OPENING

The screen is dark.

MUSIC: Minimalist but evocative, a plaintive violin and a piano. A quiet guitar joins in.

A hydrangea blossoms slowly and from the unfurling petals grow the title:

TITLE CARD: To a Stranger

CUT TO:

INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - A HALLWAY. DAY.

MARK - a man in his late 30s who is, on the surface, entirely unremarkable - is waiting on a bench in the starkly-lit hallway of the hospital while his brother is in surgery.

Mark is miserably, weightily weary. He looks like he hasn’t shaved in a few days, his boring hair is unkempt from his fretting, and his clothes, while of good quality, are rumpled. He is on the far left of the frame, seated alone, knees together, hands on his thighs, looking straight ahead. The frame is empty of anyone save him.

Slow dolly out.

In trickles, the hallway grows busy - people rush by, their faces out of frame. The world seems to be moving in fast-forward; Mark is living in slow-mo. His every gesture is a struggle through molasses.

A NURSE knocks into small table beside the bench as she rushes past. The nurse catches a vase of flowers before it upends, and places it back onto the table, then goes on her way. But a double-headed hydrangea blossom has fallen out onto the floor.

CLOSE ON:

Mark picks up the flower and contemplates it.

BENJAMIN - dressed from what we can see in surgery greens and an impeccably pressed lab coat - comes to stand in front of Mark. His back is to the camera. He is cool and aloof, and waits for Mark to look up.

Mark takes his time raising his eyes to meet Benjamin’s, afraid of what this doctor is about to say. He sets aside the hydrangea.

(CONTINUED)
BENJAMIN
Mark Farthing?

MARK
Yes.

A hand reaches out - offering a business card. Mark, a little dazed, takes it.

BENJAMIN
I’m Doctor Benjamin Cummings. I’m--

MARK
I know. James?

A beat. Finally the camera finds Benjamin’s face: he is in his mid-30s, slim, with a face so intelligent and sharp you could cut your hand trying to pinch his cheeks. He has a riot of luxurious, dark curls that are sweaty and matted from hours under a surgery cap. Benjamin isn’t discomfited so much as annoyed that Mark has thrown him off his spiel.

BENJAMIN
Your brother is out of surgery, and has been moved into a recovery room.

MARK
And the surgery? Did you... did you get it all?

Another long moment of silence. Benjamin doesn’t answer.

MARK (CON’T)
I... I see. Ah. Thank you. Doctor.

Visibly attempting to hold back tears, Mark stands up to shake Benjamin’s hand. Benjamin does not take it.

WIDE ON:
Mark drops his hand and jams it into his pocket, uncomfortable.

Benjamin checks his clipboard and launches into his previously aborted spiel:

BENJAMIN
The surgery was, as far as I am allowed to say, a complete success. The cancerous tumors were removed via laparoscopic surgery. While this form of cancer can (MORE)
BENJAMIN (cont’d)
metastasize, I am confident that Mr. Farthing will fully recover and have a complete remission. That said, I would like to consult with his MD-Team and schedule a follow up appointment to discuss a course of targeted chemotherapy to prevent recurrence.

Mark is poleaxed, unable to follow what Benjamin is saying at the speed the doctor is rattling off his diagnosis. He’s also off-put by the arrogance in Benjamin’s tone and word choices. He shakes his head, trying to get some energy up so he can pay attention.

MARK
I... alright. I can... I can schedule an... an appointment.

BENJAMIN
See that you do. There will be counseling sessions to book as well. The hospital will recommend a doctor once your brother has been discharged, though you are welcome to attend an alternative choice. Nevertheless, that doctor must report back to me as head of the MD-team. Once Mr. Farthing is awake we will be moving him into a private room. You will be taking him home in two days.

MARK
I will?

BENJAMIN
Yes. The incision was under his left armpit, so as his caregiver you must ensure that he wears loose clothing and does not rotate or lift his arm extensively for at least one week. This includes no video games, no driving, and no reaching or lifting. No submersion in water until the skin has closed. Change the butterfly bandage only after the first three days, and once per day thereafter.

(CONTINUED)
MARK
But, the lump... I mean, you can’t give someone with no tits a mastectomy...

Benjamin offers Mark a scathing look.

BENJAMIN
Consult with his physiotherapist for a recovery regime.

MARK
But the breast tissue...

BENJAMIN
Mr. Farthing. With all due respect, there is a reason that I am head of the oncological surgery team here.

MARK
Ah. Yes. I just... I read--

BENJAMIN
On the internet, I presume?

MARK
Well, yes. James wanted me to ask about--

BENJAMIN
Then your brother may ask me when we meet for his followup appointment. Now, if you’ll excuse me, Mr. Farthing, with all due respect this has been a very long day and I should like to check up on your brother and then end it.

MARK
Wha...? Yes. Of... of course. Thank you. Can I go in to see--

Mark raises his hand to shake again, but Benjamin doesn’t even wait for him to finish his sentence before turning on his heel and walking off.

MARK (CON’T)
Asshole.

Mark jams the business card in his wallet, and walks to the nurse’s station to find out where they took his brother.
INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - JAMES' ROOM. DAY.

JAMES is asleep. He is on a stand-drip, and hooked up to some machines, but his face is free of tubing and he is tucked in neatly.

The camera lingers on his face and, surprise, it turns out that James and Mark are identical twins. James, however, is much more fit, his face less weary and more tanned.

Mark lets himself into James' room, quietly shutting the door behind him. He sits in the chair by the bed, and watches James' face intently for a moment.

Mark reaches out and places his hand on James' chest, just feeling him breathe. Slowly, the tiredness returning, Mark takes James' hand.

EST. CONDO BUILDING. NIGHT.

*Pure Spirits Condo* in the Distillery District.

A condominium near downtown, overlooking the harbour. It's all glass and chrome, clearly expensive and the stomping grounds of well-heeled professionals.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JAMES' CONDO. NIGHT.

The hallway is clean, kept up, and fairly newish. Everything is muted and tasteful, the colors just this side of cold.

Mark is walking towards James' condo, juggling grocery bags, a garment bag, and a wheelie suitcase. He fumbles and mutters with the keys.

He nearly drops everything in his exhaustion.

A neighbor comes up the hall behind him. From the back of his head, it is clear that it is Benjamin, but Mark cannot see that.

MARK
Hey, sorry, could you help me figure out which--

The neighbor utterly ignores him and lets himself into his own condo and shuts the door.

MARK (CON’T)
(to himself)
Asshole!
The condo consists of an entry way with a closet on one side and a narrow table with a bowl for bric-a-brac on the other. The entry way opens nearly immediately onto an open-plan living room/dining room/kitchen.

The kitchen is to the left, the living room directly off the entry way, and the dining room behind that, with the table up against the glass wall that overlooks a balcony. His condo faces the perennial construction pit that is the Lower Don Valley neighborhood.

To the right, a hallway leads to James’ room, the guest room/office, and a bathroom.

The balcony is populated by a bike, some old plant pots, a very crappy man-cave style armchair. The dining room consists of flat-pack-special table with two chairs, and a tall glass shelf unit behind that of an array of tempting, masculine liquor bottles and glasses.

The living room is dominated by a massive television on a low-slung entertainment unit, again a flat-pack special, but well cared for, and banded on either side by bookshelves filled with gaming systems, video games, and blu-ray cases. Things are a big dusty, and well loved, but generally neat. The sofa is leather.

The kitchen, by contrast to the rest of the place, is nearly barren. The only appliances he has on the counter are an old, battered coffee machine and an equally crappy toaster leftover from his student days. The shelves are only half-filled. There is a big bowl on the counter of individually-wrapped single-use plastic cutlery and another of the kinds of packets of sauces that come from take-out.

James is a man who respects his stuff, even if it’s not top quality. He’s also a man who eats take-out a lot.

The walls are decorated with sports memorabilia - his own framed jersey from his hockey days in college, a nail hung with a season’s pass to the Leafs, etc.

Right in the entry-way there are framed photos on the wall of James’ police academy graduation, his certificate in Police Services, and a goofy photo of Mark wearing James’ dress uniform hat at a bar.

Mark lets himself in and drops everything he is carrying in the entry way, exhausted.

James’ cat HIGHTOWER greets Mark at the door.
MARK
Hello, you menace.

Mark spares Hightower a scritch, hauls the groceries into the kitchen, feeds Hightower, and takes his bag to the spare room.

On his way back out, Mark pauses in the threshold of his brother’s room.

INT. JAMES’ CONDO - JAMES’ BEDROOM. DAY.

This is clearly a bachelor’s bedroom; everything in here is designed to seduce. The bed is made up with pillows in reds and burgundies, a sort of cheap looking sateen. There’s a champagne bottle on one of the side tables with the remains of a melted-down candle sticking out if its mouth. The dresser is tall, and the top littered with a bowl of condoms, a bottle of massage oil, and a book of matches.

The closet is open, and Mark moves to close it. He pauses, hand on the handle, and looks up at the safe resting on the top shelf above where James’ uniforms are hung. He reaches up. Hesitates. He very tentatively tugs the handle. The safe doesn’t budge. He tugs harder. It doesn’t open.

Mark reaches up and tries to pull the safe down. It is bolted in place.

Mark sighs and closes the closet door.

EST. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE. DAY.

Corner of Murray St. and Orde St.

INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - JAMES’ ROOM. DAY.

Mark is sitting by James’ bedside, reading through a stack of medical brochures and pamphlets, and printouts from the internet. He is fidgety, crossing and uncrossing his legs, having trouble paying attention. His eyes stay on the pamphlet, but his fingers tap, his knee bounces, and he chews on his lip.

James is watching TV, doped up to the gills.

The show is some cop procedural, and James snorts at some antic onscreen, then grimaces and puts his free hand over his shoulder.

JAMES
Fuck, ow.

(CONTINUED)
MARK
(without looking up)
Don’t move it.

JAMES
I didn’t move it. I laughed.

MARK
Then don’t laugh.

JAMES
(jerking his head at the TV)
They got the Miranda Rights wrong.

Mark sighs, long suffering, and finally looks up.

MARK
James...

JAMES
Yeah, yeah.

MARK
Does it...? Does it hurt more? I can call a nurse...

Mark stands and moves toward the door, but stops when James says:

JAMES
Fuck’s sake, Mark. I’m fine.

MARK
I’m just trying to--

JAMES
I know.

MARK
Well it’s not like you’d ever speak up.

JAMES
(dismissive)
Yeah, okay.

MARK
So you gotta work with me, punk, you gotta--

JAMES
I know! Fuck, okay Mark? I know!
Fuck... owww.
MARK
See, this is exactly what I’m talking about! You never... you never let me help.

JAMES
I’m a grown ass man, and I don’t need your--

MARK
You do! Shut up, James, you do!

JAMES
Aww, shut up. Jesus, I’m not dying.

MARK
(furious outburst)
Well, not anymore!

James is surprised by the force of Mark’s anger.

MARK (CON’T)
Jesus, James, do you have any idea what this has been... what I’ve been... god dammit.

Mark covers his face, barely holding it together but not willing to let his macho brother see it.

MARK (CON’T)
Fuck.

James, uncomfortable by this display of emotion, resumes watching TV. Mark takes a long moment to get himself together, huffing and pressing his lips into lines and swallowing his heart.

MARK (CON’T)
You want a coffee?

JAMES
(snide)
Do your pamphlets say I’m allowed?

MARK
(angry again)
I’m just trying to make sure that you-- aww, fuck. Who cares what they say? Do you want a coffee?

JAMES
Yeah.

(Continued)
MARK
Yeah. Fine. Yeah.

Mark leaves the room.

10 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - A HALLWAY. DAY.

Mark leans against the wall, taking a moment to breathe and calm down. Then he heads towards the cafeteria.

The double-headed hydrangea is still in the vase by the sofa. He plucks it out and chucks it in the garbage, punching the flap viciously as he walks by.

11 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - CAFETERIA. DAY.

The man at the end of the coffee line is Benjamin. Mark hesitates when he realizes it’s him, then nuts up and gets in line behind the doctor.

There is a curl at the back of Benjamin’s neck and Mark becomes transfixed with it.

When Benjamin has paid and turns to go, Mark makes as if to say hello. Benjamin doesn’t even notice him, and walks right by.

Mark deflates. Then he steps up, and orders two coffees.

12 INT. JAMES’ CONDO. DAY.

Close On:

Hightower waiting patiently at the door. It opens, and Mark and James shuffle through. Mark has his hands full with James’ overnight bag, and a large pizza box.

James is drawn and shuffles straight to the sofa.

MARK
Gimmie a sec and I’ll help you--

James lowers himself gingerly down into the corner of the sofa, not waiting for Mark.

MARK (CON’T)

Or not.

Mark sets the pizza on the coffee table within reach and leaves the room to put away James’ bag.

Hightower jumps up onto James’ lap. James uses his good arm to pet the cat.

(CONTINUED)
JAMES
Hello, you menace.

James opens the box, pulls out a slice, and picks off the pepperoni. He holds it out for Hightower, who is eagerly anticipating this offer. The cat eats with relish. James, on the other hand, takes a bit of his pizza and doesn’t look too thrilled about it.

INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BENJAMIN’S OFFICE. DAY.

Benjamin has a corner office overlooking the busy University street. His desk is overlarge and richly polished, with a leather blotter and tasteful wood-and-gold nameplate and stationary-holder set. Even his in and out boxes are leather, not plastic.

The chairs for patients are leather club seats, and his own desk chair is leather and impressive. There is a credenza/filing cabinet of a matching wood all along the wall behind his desk, over which are hung light-boxes and chart-holders.

Benjamin is clearly a very important doctor at the hospital.

Tacked up behind Benjamin are an MRI and a CT scan of James’ chest.

Mark and James are sitting on one side of the desk, Benjamin on the other, like a king holding court.

There are hydrangeas in the vase on the corner of Benjamin’s desk, and Mark can’t tear his eyes away from them. Anything is better than looking at the scans.

BENJAMIN
I am quite confident that we caught every tumor, Mr. Farthing. That you will be entering a course of chemotherapy is, of course, nonnegotiable. But at this point it is more of a safety procedure than a necessity.

MARK
Of course. There’s no question of that.

JAMES
(to mark)
Dude, you could let me--
MARK
Sorry. Of course.

Benjamin watches the byplay between with brothers with stony indifference.

BENJAMIN
I’ve sent a chemotherapy requisition to the department, so you should be receiving a phone call regarding your first appointment within the week.

JAMES
Thanks, man.

Benjamin clearly does not like being called "man."

BENJAMIN
You will attend.

JAMES
Yeah, sure.

Benjamin looks to Mark for confirmation, but Mark is too chastised to comment. He’s feeling a little resentful; he was just trying to take care of his brother.

Benjamin stands and gathers up his notes to keep from having to shake hands.

BENJAMIN
Well then. Good day, Mr. Farthing. And welcome to remission.

JAMES
Yeah, man! Yeah! Thanks! Feels awesome.

James sticks out his left hand to shake, and Benjamin raises an eyebrow at him and does not take it.

JAMES(CON’T)
Right, right. Sorry. Thanks doc.

James shoves his left arm back into his sling, wincing.

BENJAMIN
You’re welcome. I’m sure.
Mark stands now, and knows better than to hold out his hand. The brothers leave the office. Benjamin stares after them, his expression unreadable. His eyes drop down on the Farthing twin’s bodies for a moment, then jump back up. He shakes his head, annoyed with himself.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
(to himself; snide)
Ah yes, very professional, doctor.

Benjamin closes the door of his office.

14 EST. A LOW-RISE OFFICE BUILDING. DAY.

A red-brick office building that has seen better days, in among the low-income community housing and run-down apartment buildings of the Leslieville area.

15 INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.

Mark is one of two partners in a small family law firm. His office is a bit cramped, and his furniture is scuffed and worn, but it is all clean. His windows, shaded by cheap vertical blinds, open on an alley way.

Mark is on speaker phone with James.

He is distracted, shuffling through papers looking for something. His office is otherwise freakishly tidy, but the file folder in his hands looks like it’s vomited all over the blotter.

As this conversation progresses the camera cuts back and forth between the brothers as they speak.

MARK
Well, no, James, in fact I don’t think it’s a good idea.

16 INT. JAMES’ CONDO. DAY.

James is seated on his sofa and, contrary to orders, is playing a video game. He’s got his phone tucked between his shoulder and his ear, and he winces when he jerks his controller.

JAMES
The precinct is playing the 107th and I--
INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.
Mark points his pen at the phone, scolding.

MARK
Cannot bowl.

INT. JAMES’ CONDO. DAY.

JAMES
Jesus, mom, it’s been a week.
He throws down his controller.

INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.

MARK
Your first chemo is tomorrow afternoon.

INT. JAMES’ CONDO. DAY.

JAMES
(frustrated)
Stop micromanaging me. I’m a big boy, man. I can lift a--

INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.

MARK
You absolutely cannot. If you promised me that you’d just sit and watch, I would have no problems with it, but I know you. You’ll have a few beers, get it into your head that you’re invincible, then rip open your incisions. They’ve barely healed over and--

JAMES (OVERLAPPING) (O.S)
I don’t think I’m invincible, Mark I-

Mark is growing angrier and angrier. He stands up, planting his hands on the desk, and getting very red and shouty.

MARK
Yes, you do. That’s half the reason we’re in this situation in the first place! You never go to your annual checkups, you never listened--
JAMES (O.S.)
Jesus, Mark!

MARK (OVERLAPPING)
--to what your own goddamn body was trying to tell you for eight goddamn months--

INT. JAMES’ CONDO. DAY.

22
JAMES
Mark!

MARK (O.S.)
-- and all you care about is your goddamn macho pride and what your buddies will think of you! Well, guess what, we’re not nineteen any more--

JAMES
Mark!

There is stunned silence on the other end of the line. Mark blows out a groan, regretting what he’s said nearly instantly.

JAMES (O.S.)
Hey, fuck you, man. I haven’t called you a faggot in literally a decade!

MARK
I’m sorry.

JAMES (O.S.)
Fuck your ‘sorry’. That was low.

Another long silence. Mark is angry still, but it’s bleeding out. Mark sinks down into his chair, covers his face, exhausted.
INT. JAMES’ CONDO. DAY.

JAMES
Fine. I won’t go.

MARK (O.S.)
Thank you.

James sits back, stung and pretending like he’s not, shoving down his emotions.

JAMES (falsely nonchalant)
What would I say to the guys, anyway?

A pause.

MARK (O.S.)
You could tell them the truth.

James shifts on the sofa. He doesn’t like that idea at all.

MARK (CON’T) (O.S.)
There’s nothing shameful in a man with bre--

JAMES (sharp)
I said no, man.

INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.

Mark is startled with how vehement James is about keeping this a secret.

MARK
Okay. Right. Okay.

A beat.

JAMES (O.S.)
Feel like Thai tonight?

MARK
Yeah. Yeah, sure. I’m leaving work soon. Uh, as soon as I get this damn Brabant case file in some sort of order.

JAMES (O.S.)
So, around midnight then?
Mark laughs. It is a relieved laugh, a genuine laugh. He hasn’t had many of those lately, and he startles himself.

MARK
Yeah. Yeah. I’ll be home soon. Call ahead - I’ll pick it up on my way back.

JAMES (O.S.)
’kay.

Mark hangs up.

INT. THE THAI PLACE. NIGHT.

The restaurant is little more than a battered counter, an ancient cash register, a blackboard with hand-written specials, and beat-up linoleum that is peeling and cracking. The walls are painted a sort of dirty terra cotta and haphazardly decorated with all sorts of random charity-shop art.

Mark, rumpled and carrying the Brabant file (it’s marked as such) enters and gets into the queue. There are about four people ahead of him.

The CASHIER behind the counter sees him and makes a gesture to him that his order is nearly ready. Obviously, James comes here a lot.

Benjamin is ahead of him in line again, though it takes Mark a moment of fatigued staring to realize it. That little curl on the nape of Benjamin’s neck is way too appealing in Mark’s tired state.

When Benjamin receives his order and turns to leave, Mark tries to say hello again, and again is ignored.

Already filled with residual anger over his fight with James, Mark snatches his order off the counter, throws down his money, and chases Benjamin out the door.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE THAI PLACE. NIGHT.

The Thai place is just a few doors down from the Condo, in the Distillery District.

Mark stomps across the cobblestone after Benjamin.

MARK
What the hell is wrong with you?
Startled, not expecting to be accosted, Benjamin freezes. Mark catches up to him, puffing, indignant, and circles around Benjamin to get in his face.

BENJAMIN
Well, I’m not the one yelling at strangers in the street, for one.

MARK
Strangers! God, you can’t even— no. No, of course not.

Mark deflates. He feels like ten kinds of idiot.

MARK (CON’T)
Right. You must see a hundred patients a day. And most of them are dying so you probably don’t bother to--

BENJAMIN
Oh, no. I do remember the dying ones. Always.

MARK
What? Why?

BENJAMIN
Because they were the failures. They were the mistakes I will not allow myself to make again.

MARK
Well that’s... cold.

BENJAMIN
It is efficient. My job is cut cancer out of people, Mr. Farthing. Not to be a bleeding heart. Good evening.

Benjamin swings away, and using a key fob, enters James’ condo building. He clearly also lives there.

Mark watches him go, and then the fact that Benjamin used his last name clicks, and he scrambles to catch up, getting through the door before it closes.
INT. LOBBY OF JAMES’ CONDO BUILDING. NIGHT.

Mark follows Benjamin to the elevator.

MARK
Hey, no, wait a second. You do know me.

Benjamin sighs, put out.

BENJAMIN
Yes, I remember who you are, Mr. Farthing. Twin brother of a male breast cancer patient. It is singular enough to stick in one’s mind.

MARK
So why did you--?

The elevator arrives. Mark pushes the button for James’ floor. Benjamin does not push a button.

BENJAMIN
Would you be interested in making small talk with the man who shouted at you in the street?

MARK
(trying for flirty)
No, I guess not.

BENJAMIN
Then you guess correctly.

The elevator stops on their floor. Benjamin exits.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
Good evening, Mr. Farthing.

MARK
I, uh. Good evening, Dr. Cummings.

Mark exits the elevator, and watches as Benjamin lets himself into an condo a few doors down from James’. Then he sighs and heads back to his temporary home.
It is the next morning. Mark is looking put together, like the lawyer he is, and he is holding two takeaway cups of coffee. He is standing in front of Benjamin’s condo door.

He takes a moment to collect himself, then knocks.

Benjamin, clearly on his way out to work, opens the door whilst tying his tie.

BENJAMIN
Yes? What?

MARK
I... um, I wanted to apologize for--

BENJAMIN
Oh, for god’s sake.

MARK
What?

BENJAMIN
No.

MARK
That’s it? Just no?

BENJAMIN
No, I will not accept bribes to help your brother get better care. He already has the best. He is fine.

MARK
(spluttering)
I didn’t... that’s not why I...

BENJAMIN
Or that I’m a doctor? I wasn’t certain you played for my team, but who can tell? Did your mother always encouraged you to snare one?

MARK
No! I’m a lawyer, I don’t need a doctor to be my sugar da--

BENJAMIN
You didn’t really come to apologize for shouting at me last night.
MARK
Yes! Actually, I have!

BENJAMIN
Why?

MARK
Because that’s what people do!

BENJAMIN
Not in my experience.

MARK
Then you’ve been hanging around the wrong people. Look, here. Take it. I’m sorry.

Benjamin doesn’t take it.

BENJAMIN
I don’t drink coffee.

He closes the door in Mark’s face.

MARK
God, you are a *prick*!

30 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BENJAMIN’S OFFICE. DAY.

It is several days later. The brothers are back in Benjamin’s office.

Mark is sitting with his arms crossed, glaring out the window. Benjamin is focused entirely on James, and James is oblivious to the tension in the room.

James looks sick and wane, but he is smiling.

JAMES
Naw, man, I’m holding up. I’m cool.

BENJAMIN
I’m pleased to see no extra unexpected side effects related to the chemotherapy, so we’ll continue with the entire course of treatment. Is that acceptable to you, Mr. Farthing?

JAMES
Sure, man.
BENJAMIN
That’s an affirmative, then?

JAMES
Yeah. Yes.

BENJAMIN
Excellent. If you’ll sign here.
This form just acknowledges that
I’ve informed you of the risks and
you’ve given your permission to
continue with the course of
treatment.

He pushes a clipboard with a form across the desk, and James
signs.

BENJAMIN
And you as well, please, Mr.
Farthing.

Mark, startled out of his glare, whips around.

MARK
What? Why me?

BENJAMIN
As his primary caregiver, you also
need to be informed of the risks of
chemotherapy. As a lawyer, Mr.
Farthing, I thought you’d be aware
of the necessity of your signature.

Low blow.

Mark snatches the form, reads it quickly. Then he signs it,
glowering at Benjamin. James becomes aware of the tension
for the first time.

JAMES
Am I missing something?

MARK
Nothing.

Benjamin stands, dismissing them.

BENJAMIN
If there’s anything else you
gentlemen need. Related to Mr.
Farthing’s case, that is...
MARK
Right, okay. I get it. I’m sorry.
It was a gesture, okay? Sorry. I
promise, I won’t try to be nice to
you again. Prick.

Mark storms out of the room. James trails after him,
bemused. Benjamin watches them go from behind the desk. One
side of his mouth curls up into an involuntary grin. He
shuts it down immediately.

31
EXT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTER - PARKING GARAGE. DAY.
31

Mark stomps over to his car, James trailing in his wake, amused.

JAMES
I’m just saying that if I was into
dudes, I’d have a crush on him,
too.

MARK
I don’t have a crush. I’m a grown
man. Grown men don’t have crushes.

JAMES
Says you.

MARK
Yes! Says me. And me says -- I
mean, I say that I don’t have a

JAMES
Methinks the lady doth protest too
much.

Mark whirls around on his brother, middle finger up.

JAMES (CON’T)
Right, sorry, right. But you still
protest too much.

MARK
He’s an asshole, okay? Just... it
won’t endanger your care, I
promise. But maybe I should stop
coming to your meetings.

JAMES
What, and deprive me of the
opportunity to watch you pulling
the doc’s pigtails?

(CONTINUED)
MARK
(giving into the humor of the image)
Aw, shut up. Get in the damned car.

JAMES
Yessir.

Though it takes some careful maneuvering, James gets into the damned car.

32 INT. MARK’S CAR. DAY.

They get in. Mark starts the engine, shifts gears, and puts his hands on the wheel. He looks thoughtful.

MARK
He does have pretty luxurious hair.

JAMES
(laughing)
Aw, now you shut up. Drive.

MARK
Home first? Or pizza?

JAMES
Nah, I’m good.

Mark stares at James. He’s never declined pizza before.

JAMES (CON’T)
Chill, man. I’m good. Just not hungry, okay? It’s not like I’m dying.

MARK
No. No, not any more.

JAMES
See? Not any more.
(a beat)
Thanks to Doctor McHottieHair.

MARK
(groans)
Oh, god, stop it.

Mark backs out of the parking space. James laughs, and winces, and put his hand over his left shoulder when Mark is preoccupied looking in the rear view mirror.
James stares at his exposed chest in the mirror. The bandages are gone, but there is still a massive purple bruise around his left armpit.

He winces, raises his arm, and inspects the surgery site. It is red, and angry, but the wounds are closed and puffy with new scar tissue, and clearly tender.

He spreads his right palm across his left pectoral, feeling, searching, kneading. Worried.

Hightower winds around his feet.

Mark exits the elevator after a long day at work. Benjamin is about to enter the elevator, wearing jogging apparel, and they nearly bump into one another.

MARK
Oh, sorry I-- oh. This is getting a bit ridiculous.

BENJAMIN
I’ll say. Especially when I’ve never seen you in this building before. When did you move in?

MARK
Well, it’s James’ place. I’m here to be, you know...

BENJAMIN
His primary caregiver.

MARK
Yeah. Um. I guess that you two must have had different hours before, so...

BENJAMIN
Obviously.

MARK
Right. Okay. Goodnight Dr. Cummings.

Mark shifts out of Benjamin’s way so he can get on the elevator. Benjamin enters and turns to face the hallway.
BENJAMIN
Mr. Farthing, perhaps it’s appropriate for me to apolo--

The doors close on the rest of what he was going to say. It doesn’t matter though. Mark didn’t wait for him to speak.

INT. ELEVATOR IN JAMES’ CONDO BUILDING. NIGHT.

Benjamin, clearly frustrated with himself, scrubs his hands through his hair. He puts in his earbuds and when the elevator opens, jogs into the otherwise empty lobby.

INT. JAMES’ CONDO. NIGHT.

Mark enters the condo, drops his briefcase, sheds his coat, and scritches Hightower.

MARK
Hello, you menace.

Mark goes to the living room, where James is on the phone.

JAMES
Yeah, yeah Ma. No, he just got in.

Mark waves vaguely, and walks into the kitchen and opens the fridge, searching for a beer. He emerges with one, listening to James’ phone call. As James talks he pops the top, and then pulls out leftover Thai food and assembles two plates and microwaves them.

JAMES (CON’T)
Marky-poo says hi, Mum. Uh huh.... no, just tired mostly. Like I could sleep for a week. ... Uh huh. Well... no, that’s what all the pamphlets say. It’s normal, Ma. .... uh huh. Yeah, I know, Mum. No, I’m fine. I swear it. I’m fine. Love you, too. Bye.

Mark comes back into the room as James hangs up, juggling the beer and the two plates. He offers one to James.

JAMES (CON’T)
Nah, I’m good.

MARK
When was the last time you ate?
JAMES
Had a late lunch. I’m fine.

Mark looks back at the otherwise pristine kitchen, frowning dubiously.

JAMES (CON’T)
I did my dishes.

MARK
You did the dishes.

JAMES
What? I got bored.

MARK
You’ve never gotten bored enough to do the dishes before.

JAMES
I’m a new man.

MARK
Clearly.

They sit down on the sofa, shoving aside blankets and pillows. James turns on the TV and pets Hightower, who jumps up for a snuggle. Mark eats in silence, James’s dinner abandoned on the coffee table.

INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - A WAITING AREA. DAY.

Mark is in a nominally crowded waiting area populated with other people; they are laughing, chatting, sipping crappy vending machine coffee, reading magazines, and napping. There are plastic plants and vending machines against one wall.

Mark has his laptop on his knees and a sheaf of papers spread out on the seat next to him and a pencil behind his ear.

There is a hydrangea on the table beside his coffee cup.

Mark grabs the pencil, looks between the screen and the paper, makes a notation on the topmost sheet of paper, looks back up to the screen, and then drops his pencil into his coffee as if it’s his desk pen holder. A second later he realizes what he’s done and groans, fishes the pencil out, shakes it off, and puts it back behind his ear.

Benjamin, walking by, stops and watches the performance. His mouth twitches towards a smile again, but he stops it.
BENJAMIN
You know, Mr. Farthing--

MARK
(surprised)
Oh, fuck!

Mark jumps, upsetting the table, nearly dumps his laptop, coffee, and the vase onto the floor and scrambles to catch them.

BENJAMIN
My specialty is oncology, but my general practitioner days are not so far behind me that even I cannot see that you are working toward a spectacular hypertension-induced cardiac event.

MARK
Christ, you startled me.

BENJAMIN
My apologies.

MARK
(snorts)
Oh, so you believe in apologies now?

Benjamin looks chastened.

BENJAMIN
I believe I deserved that.

Mark, startled, closes his laptop and actually pays attention.

BENJAMIN
It has occurred to me that I... perhaps was ungracious.

MARK
I shouldn’t have yelled at you.

BENJAMIN
It was rude of me to ignore you.

MARK
You were doing it on purpose?

Benjamin looks furtively around the waiting room.
BENJAMIN
Perhaps we can... take this conversation elsewhere? My office or...?

MARK
Yes - but, no, no, so sick of being in this hospital I could scream. I have, um, an hour until James is done with his blood transfusion. Is there a coffee shop or...?

BENJAMIN
McCaul-Orde park is a block that way.

MARK
That sounds perfect.

BENJAMIN
Follow me.

38
EXT. McCAUL-ORDE PARK. DAY.

Mark and Benjamin have coffees and are sitting on a park bench beside one another. Behind the bench is a large hydrangea bush, in full bloom. For a moment, the two men sip in silence.

MARK
Well?

BENJAMIN
Well what?

MARK
I thought the whole point of coming out here was so that you could explain why you were ignoring me.

BENJAMIN
Yes... I. Ahem. I just...

MARK
Don’t tell me you’ve changed your mind.

BENJAMIN
No. It’s simply that I’ve never had to, ah, articulate it before. I, um, you must understand that I...
MARK  
(gently)  
I’m listening.

Benjamin blows out a sigh, suddenly agitated and very visibly nervous. Mark is startled by the change in demeanor.

BENJAMIN  
You must understand that I am good, Mark. I am very good at what I do. I am, quite simply, probably the best at it in the country, if not on the continent.

MARK  
Okay. Don’t be too modest or anything.

BENJAMIN (flashing a smile)  
I only say this so you’ll understand what I mean when I say that... I fail. I fail quite a lot actually.

MARK  
You said you remember the dying ones.

BENJAMIN  
I remember all of them, Mr. Farthing.

MARK  
Mark.

BENJAMIN  
Mark, then. I remember all of them. The children, and the old men, the young women who will never be mothers after I am done with them. I remember all of them. Part of it is ... I am clever, Mark. You don’t get to be head of oncology without being clever, and you don’t often get to be clever without a fantastic memory. Do you understand me?

MARK  
Yes.

(CONTINUED)
BENJAMIN
Good. But another part is...

He lays a hand on his chest, face screwing up with his frustration at being unable to articulate what he’s trying to say. He looks quite anxious about it, actually, on the verge of a big emotional moment. He looks ready to cry.

MARK
It’s okay. I get it.

BENJAMIN
No, you don’t. It’s... I am the bad guy.

MARK
The what?

BENJAMIN
When we talk about the monster that comes in the night, the mutant cells that live under the bed and attack everyone who passes indiscriminately, when we talk of the bogeyman that is cancer, the monster has my face.

MARK
But you don’t cause people--

BENJAMIN
No. But I am the one who must tell them.

Mark is silent for a moment, considering.

MARK
I think I get it.

BENJAMIN
No matter how it turns out, no matter if in the end I am the knight who cuts the dragon out of the princess, I am first the messenger who tells them that the dragon is there at all.

MARK
Not every fairy-tale needs a good old-fashioned villain, Dr. Cummings.
BENJAMIN
Benjamin.

MARK
Benjamin.

BENJAMIN
Whether it needs one or not, it has one. And it wears my face. So you can... ahem. You can see why I choose not to... not to interact with... I mean, on a social scale...

MARK
So what makes me different? Why talk to me now?

Benjamin casts Mark a hopeless look. It takes Mark a moment to parse what Benjamin’s look means. And then he throws back his head and laughs.

BENJAMIN
Oh. Well. That’s not hurtful.

MARK
Sorry. Sorry. I just... this is... James would love this.

BENJAMIN
(squirming)
I’ll admit, I... ah... admired your brother first. When I saw him in our building. But...when I met you...

MARK
(self-deprecating)
None of the muscles, all of the paranoia? Is that what does it for you?

BENJAMIN
All of the care.

Mark, flustered by this unexpected compliment, stares at his coffee in shocked silence. Benjamin takes this the wrong way, and scrambles to get Mark to understand.

BENJAMIN
I wanted to tell you, wanted to stop ignoring you because you... you care. It’s so clear that you care.
MARK
I care?

BENJAMIN
You care so much, and I’ve never... never seen... never had...

MARK
Oh. (The penny drops.) Oh.

BENJAMIN
I... forgive me. I shouldn’t have... of course, you aren’t...

MARK

Then?

BENJAMIN
James. And... and the hospital and...

MARK
I. Yes. Of course.

BENJAMIN
Of course.

Another long pause, but this time they stare at each other, helpless, hopeless. They are trapped by their situation. Mark licks his lips, nervous, and Benjamin’s eyes slide down to his mouth. They sway close to one another, eyes fluttering, but Mark jerks back at the last moment.

It is inappropriate. It is horrifically inappropriate for Mark to be seeking love and comfort in his brother’s doctor, for him to be taking the attention that Dr. Cummings should be paying to James and his other patients away with his own desires. And Mark is horrified at himself.

Mark stands abruptly, backing away.

MARK
I’m sorry. God, I’m sorry. Benja-- Dr. Cummings. I’m sorry.

BENJAMIN
Mark?
MARK
You’re not the villain. You’re not.
But I can’t... not with James... I can’t.

Benjamin nods once, gravely, all the tentative emotion that he had let through his cool facade with his confession freezing over.

INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - PARKING GARAGE. DAY.

Mark helps the weak and cranky, grunting, lock-jawed James into the passenger seat, then comes around to the driver’s side.

Before he gets in, he takes out his wallet and removes a business card.

Mark stands outside of the car, staring at Benjamin’s business card. He is pensive, and slightly miserable. Then his phone rings.

He jams the card back in his wallet, and answers.

MARK
Hello? Yes? Ah, sorry, Azita! Yes! Sorry, god, I’m sorry. Yes, I’ll get that file to you as soon as I get home. I meant to finish it this afternoon while James was in chemo.... yeah, no. Good. Good. He’s sleeping now. That’s... good.

Mark gets into the car.

INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BENJAMIN’S OFFICE. DAY.

Benjamin is sitting behind his desk, angry with himself. His fists are clenched, and he’s scowling. He crumples up his coffee cup and jams it into his trash bin hard.

There are hydrangeas in a vase in the corner.

INT. JAMES’ CONDO. NIGHT.

James is playing a first-person shooter videogame, shit-talking on the headset. James has started to lose his hair.
JAMES
Aw, come on, you noob. Get the fuck outta my - you stupid little shit!
Move your ass before I kill it!
(etc.)

Mark is seated behind him, at the kitchen table, reviewing case files. He looks a mess - he is clearly exhausted, rumpled, pen on his face and bags under his eyes.

Hidden from James, Mark is running his fingers over the edge of Benjamin’s well-worn business card.

EXT. THE FARThING FAMILY HOUSE. DAY.

The twins are just getting out of the car in front of the large house, meticulously landscaped on the Bridal Path. It screams money, but not in any sort of vulgar way.

An older woman, thin and white-haired, in a purple dress, stands at the door with a grin on her face. This is their mother DIANE.

DIANE
Darlings! Hallo!

JAMES
Hey, Mum.

James tries to wave and winces instead.

James leans against the car, and waits for Mark to come help him up the driveway. Diane takes a few steps toward them, down the walk, but Mark stops her:

MARK
We’re good.

James isn’t looking so good - the chemo has really started to do a number on him. He’s looking sallow and wan, and his hair has begun to thin.

Mark looks exhausted, but pleased to be home. He lets James lean on him, and together they approach the house. Their mother kisses them both on their cheeks and wraps them into a hug together.

DIANE
And how are my boys feeling? You both look wretched.

(CONTINUED)
JAMES
Mum!

MARK
(laughing)
Gee, thanks, mum.

DIANE
Come inside, come inside. Dinner’s almost ready. James, you need to save your father from himself. He’s determined to carve the roast—

JAMES
Hell, no. (Calls into the house:) Dad! This is the Toronto Metropolitan Police. Freeze! Put. Down. The knife!

Their father, spry and twinkly-eyed for his age, pops his head out the door and grins. This is OLIVER. He is wielding a fake knife.

OLIVER
What if I resist arrest?

James reaches out and transfers his weight onto his father, shouldering his way past Mark and Diane, and enters the house. Oliver helps him walk inside. Mark grins at his mum and they share a laugh.

MARK
Don’t use your left arm... James! (He sighs) Like talking into a hurricane, he is.

Mark and Diane linger on the front step for a moment.

DIANE
And how are you, darling?

Diane reaches out and cups Mark’s face, runs her thumb along the bottom of the bags under his eyes. Mark leans into the touch.

DIANE (CON’T)
You know James can come stay with us. Or I can sleep in his spare room fora while.

MARK
We’re fine, Mum. We’re both fine. Everything’s going to be just...
DIANE
Fine?

MARK
Yeah.

Mark holds up bottle of wine - it’s sweating in the sunlight - and gestures with it to the inside of the house. Diane smiles and Mark goes in ahead of her. Diane looks after him with pity in her eyes. Then she straightens herself, and goes inside.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JAMES’ CONDO. NIGHT.

James and Mark bicker as they exit the elevator. James looks truly horrible, and needs to lean on his brother.

MARK
I told you we should have stayed in the living room.

JAMES
I wasn’t going to make mum wash the dishes. She made dinner. You know it’s the rule.

MARK
I think you get a pass.

JAMES
(suddenly angry)
I don’t want a pass!

Mark is taken aback.

MARK
James--

JAMES
I am fine! I don’t need to be babied and I don’t need to be watched and I can damn well wash the dishes!

MARK
Funny, that’s not what you say when I want you to do them here.

James opens his mouth to argue, pauses, and his anger crinkles into amusement.
JAMES
Shut up.

MARK
You shut up.

BENJAMIN
Actually, I would quite appreciate it if you both shut up.

James and Mark turn, comically, to find Benjamin leaning out of his condo door. He is in pajamas and a very posh dressing gown, and he is scowling.

MARK
(flustered)
Ah. Dr. Cummings. Sorry. Can’t take this punk anywhere.

BENJAMIN
Not even home, apparently.

James snorts, amused, and snatches the keys out of Mark’s hand and lets himself into the apartment. It’s slow going, and it takes him a couple tries. Mark and Benjamin both watch with stricken expressions that make it clear that they would love to help but know that James would be offended.

MARK
Sorry again for the noise.

James walks into the apartment. Mark is about to follow him, but stops when Benjamin clears his throat.

BENJAMIN
Mr. Farthing... May I have a word?

Mark takes a moment to assess Benjamin. His scowl has been replaced with something... more vulnerable. More hopeful.

Mark is torn – he doesn’t want to have to sit through another conversation like in the park. But in case it’s not about that, he wants to hear Benjamin out.

MARK
Come inside.

Benjamin hesitates.

MARK (CON’T)
I want to get James settled, then we can talk.

Benjamin tentatively follows Mark into James’ apartment.
INT. JAMES’ CONDO. NIGHT.

James shuffles out of the kitchen, hand on the walls, with a glass of water, and is surprised to see Benjamin in his condo.

JAMES
Doc?

BENJAMIN
Mr. Farthing. I, uh, I just wanted a word with your brother.

James smirks at Mark, who rolls his eyes in return.

JAMES
Yeah, sure. Whatever you say. I’m gonna go lie down for a bit.

MARK
Okay. Shout if you need anything.

JAMES
Sure. Have fun, boys. Call me if you’re going to be out late. Wear a condom.

MARK
(scandalized)
James!

James laughs and shuts the bedroom door behind him.

A beat.

Mark walks toward the dining table, the furthest point from James’ room.

BENJAMIN
I must confess, Mr. Farthing, I’m surprised to see James out and about so soon after a treatment.

MARK
That’s what you wanted to talk about? Not the almost ki... uh, in the park?

BENJAMIN
James should be resting. Chemotherapy makes the body sicker in order to kill the cancer, so he must--
MARK
You think I don’t know that?

BENJAMIN
Then why have you allowed--

MARK
(scoffing)
Trust me when I say that I haven’t allowed my brother to do anything.

BENJAMIN
He should be listening to you.

MARK
Now I know for a fact that you’re an only child.

BENJAMIN
I don’t understand how that has any relevancy here.

MARK
If you had siblings, you’d understand how difficult it is to make one do anything. If I had a dollar of every time I heard "you’re not the boss of me" I could...

Mark sighs and trails off, scrubbing at his eyes. He looks around the condo, miserable and exhausted.

MARK (CON’T)
I could hire a damn cleaning service.

Mark moves to tidy up the dining room table, which by now has been completely taken over by his files, but his sleepy shuffles are unsteady. He trips over Hightower.

Benjamin rushes forward and seizes Mark around the waist and keeps him from crashing.

MARK (CON’T)
Shit! Fuck! Goddamn menace!

He kicks out at the cat, something he would never do if he wasn’t so scared and tired. Hightower dodges, yowls at him indignantly, and bolts into James’ room.
Mark turns in Benjamin’s arms, and nearly at once they both realize that they have somehow found themselves in a romantic clinch. It is cliche and awkward and they both shift, clearly out of their depth.

Benjamin is studying Mark’s face intently, and Mark licks his lips, half anticipation, half agony.

They shift a little in their hold, so Mark is standing on his own feet and Benjamin isn’t quite so close, but never truly separate.

BENJAMIN
Mr. Farthing. You... you’re exhausted. Possibly to the point of impairment. You should not have driven home tonight.

MARK
You’re probably right.

BENJAMIN
You are overworking yourself.

MARK
It’s gotta get done.

BENJAMIN
Surely your workplace must have compassionate leave--

MARK
I’m a partner, I can’t just--

BENJAMIN
Of course you can. I see nothing but take out boxes here, you must maintain a proper diet, for you and for James--

MARK
James hasn’t eaten a vegetable of his own free will since the day he moved out for college.

BENJAMIN
Then you must make him--

MARK
I’m not a miracle worker.

Benjamin cups Mark’s cheek and it would be intimate, romantic, if it wasn’t so clinical.
BENJAMIN
I will not allow my hard work with James to be wasted by insufficient after-care. You must--

MARK (OVERLAPPING)
Your hard work?

BENJAMIN
-- be more mindful. You will risk that if you do not take care of yourself. Hand your work over to another partner--

MARK
What? No!

BENJAMIN
Mr. Farthing... Mark, you must--

Mark shoves Benjamin back hard. Benjamin crashes into the sofa arm, and clutches it to stay upright. Mark is seething.

MARK
No. No, you don’t get to come in here and dictate how and where I parcel out my time and my energy.

BENJAMIN
But surely you see that--

Mark thrusts his hand at the messy table.

MARK
These people need me. They came to me, a lot of them specifically asked for me, because they need someone on their side. I can’t abandon them. It is a privilege to be their voice.

BENJAMIN
James needs you. He needs you to be present and well enough. And to do that you need to sleep, you need to--

MARK
This is nothing new! James will always needs me. I’m the one who picked him up from the parties he wasn’t supposed to be drinking at, I’m the one who helped him when he

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
MARK (cont’d)
thought he’d gotten his girlfriend pregnant, I’m the one who posted bail when he got into brawls in bars. So what if this time it’s just something a bit bigger? He’s my brother! Your ‘hard work’ won’t be wasted, Dr. Cummings, because taking care of James is what I do.

A beat.

Benjamin is shocked into a momentary silence. And then he glowers, mulishly.

BENJAMIN
But even that must not be at the expense of yourself.

MARK
Why not? Why not, Dr. Cummings? What good am I to anyone except in this? This is what I do. This is what I am. Just like you pointed out; all I do, all I’m good for, is to care.

Benjamin surges up, grabs Mark’s head, and tries to kiss him. It is desperate, passionate, a loss of control that is startling to both of them.

But Mark gets his hand up between them too fast and Benjamin ends up kissing Mark’s palm instead. Benjamin settles for this, sad, and stops fighting to get around Mark’s hold.

Softly, regretfully, Mark presses his own mouth against the back of his knuckles, as if he could kiss Benjamin through the barrier of flesh, and bone, and responsibility.

But he can’t. He can’t.

They part slowly, reluctantly.

BENJAMIN
You mean something more to me.

Mark pushes Benjamin away, gently this time, and laughs bitterly. The quiet, intimate magic of the moment has shattered.

MARK
No I don’t. You don’t even know me. You just want a piece of me, too.
MARK (cont’d)
You said so. In the park. You said so. You only want me because I care. Because you want someone to care for you. And I can’t, I don’t have anything left, Benjamin, Dr. Cummings. I’m tapped out. I, god I just...

Mark starts to cry - not demonstrative sobs, but just helpless, unconscious weeping of the truly beaten-down. He drops down onto the sofa.

MARK (CON’T)
I’m so tired.

Benjamin sits beside Mark. It is awkward, because he is torn between wanting to comfort Mark and the fear that he’ll be rebuffed again. His hand flexes, near to reaching over to taking Marks, then changes his mind and makes a fist. He stares straight ahead, hands primly on his knees, falling back into Doctorly Formality to protect himself.

BENJAMIN
You’re overtired. You should sleep.

MARK
I have to finish my deposition.

BENJAMIN
Whatever you write now will be gibberish. You do neither yourself, nor your clients, nor your brother any good like this.

They sit in strained silence while Mark gets himself back under control. Eventually Mark stands, and Benjamin follows suit. They stare at one another for a long moment.

BENJAMIN
Go to bed.

MARK
It’s terrible of me, it’s awful, but sometimes, sometimes I wish that it was just over. That he had... that he was...

BENJAMIN
Dead.

Mark makes an ugly noise, parts scream and part sob, and part choking on his own bile, and jams his knuckles into his mouth to stifle it.

(continues)
BENJAMIN (CON’T)
It’s not an uncommon wish, Mark.

MARK
God, don’t say that!

BENJAMIN
But I must. I’m the fairy-tale villain, remember? It is my job to say the things that no one wants to hear.

Mark shoots Benjamin a disgusted, pitying, hurt look. Benjamin takes that as his cue to leave. There are no lingering looks back.

The sound of the front door shutting is muted and miserable.

INT. JAMES’ CONDO - JAMES’ BEDROOM. NIGHT.

James is standing at the door to his bedroom, an empty glass in his hand that he clearly meant to go fill until the fight in the living room caught his attention.

His expression is shuttered and grim.

INT. THE MILL STREET BREW PUB. NIGHT.

James is out with his cop buddies. There’s one or two still in uniform, drinking coffee, but the majority of the guys are in civvies, drinking beers and pounding each other’s backs and generally goofing around in order to try to cheer James up.

James looks marginally better, more the right color, but he’s sort of on the periphery of the evening.

James’s partner RYAN is seated beside him, in the midst of telling a story.

RYAN
--so then Jamie here, he says, "No, man, I haven’t paid the ticket yet!"

The assembled officers roar with laughter. James chuckles weakly, but he’s really not all that amused. Or engaged, really.

He has a lot on his mind. His friends have to keep dragging him back into the moment. Someone reaches out at rubs his bald head, and James returns to the moment, laughs, and swats his college.
INT. JAMES’ CONDO. NIGHT.

James comes home from the bar. Hightower greets him at the door. He picks up the cat, slowly, and shuffles into the living room.

JAMES

Mark?

Mark doesn’t answer. This is because he’s asleep at the kitchen table, face-down on a pile of paperwork. James grins mischievously, and sets the cat down right on his head. Mark jerks, Hightower freaks out and bolts, and Mark sits up, suddenly wide awake.

MARK

Ouch! What the hell is wrong with you, you mental cat--

James starts howling with laughter. Mark pinches James hard, and James stumbles back, giggling, tripping over furniture.

Mark attacks, tickling, pinching, trying to get his brother in a noogie. It’s like they’re thirteen again and nothing at all in the world is wrong. They tumble all over the condo, until they collapse on the sofa.

JAMES

Uncle! Uncle!

MARK

Gotchya, punk.

James doubles over and starts hacking, coughing hard and unable to catch his breath.

MARK (CON’T)


Mark grabs James’ arms and James shoves him away, not playfully this time. He raises his arms on his own, coughing and glaring at Mark. After a few very uncomfortable moments, he stops coughing.

MARK

Fuck. Fuck. I shouldn’t have-- I’m sorry.

JAMES

I’m fine.
MARK
I shouldn’t have. I know better, dammit. I can’t--

JAMES
Aw, stop it. I’m not that fragile.

MARK
But you are! You are though, and--

JAMES
I’m not!

MARK
We shouldn’t be roughhousing.

JAMES
I’m fine! Stop fucking treating me like I’m made out of goddamned glass!

Mark is taken aback. He gapes at James, hurt. James scrubs his face with his hands, frustrated and annoyed.

JAMES

MARK
James, I--

JAMES
I’m fine. I’m sorry. I’m just tired.

MARK
Maybe we should talk about--

JAMES
I don’t want to fucking talk, okay?

MARK
Well, you can’t keep it all bottled up. Dr. Cummings said you haven’t been to any of the group counseling sessions.

JAMES
Isn’t it against patient confidentiality for your boyfriend to be discussing the details of my case with you?
MARK
First, he’s not my boyfriend. Don’t be a punk. Second, I’m your primary caregiver contact. He has every right to call me and tell me when there’s concerns about your recovery. There’s more to getting better than just being injected with chemicals or cutting something out of your body. James, if you won’t talk to me, at least talk to--

JAMES
I fucking said ‘no’, okay? I don’t want to sit in a room with a bunch of strangers whining about my life!

MARK
You don’t have to make it sound like it’s a scene out of RENT. Maybe one of the guys from the station, then? You get along with your partner, maybe he can--

JAMES
Are you out of your mind? I can’t talk about this shit with Ryan. I can’t talk about it to anyone.

MARK
Why not?

JAMES
Do you know how bad I’d get teased? I get enough shit from the guys for the cancer. I can’t tell them it’s breast cancer. I can’t tell them that I feel like shit all day, or like I’m scared I’m gonna die every time I close my eyes to sleep.

MARK
(stricken)
That’s what you really think?

JAMES
Fuck! See, this is what I mean. I can’t say this shit to anyone, because you’re all so goddamn serious. You take everything I say as a sign, or a ... an indicator of some great internal emotional

(MORE)
JAMES (cont’d)
turmoil, and it’s not! I’m just
tired, okay!

MARK
Okay. Okay! Chill out. I’m sorry I
brought it up, alright?

JAMES
Yeah, fine. Alright. Fuck. I’m
going to bed.

James stands and walks toward his bedroom.

MARK
Drink some water before you do.
You’re drunk and you look like
shit.

James stops at the door, and without turning around lobs back:

JAMES
(petulantly)
You look like shit.

Mark blurts out a surprised laugh.

MARK
God, not you too. First Dr.
Cummings, then Azita...

James turns back and stands in the hallway, watching Mark.

JAMES
Tonight’s been the first time I’ve
heard you laugh in...

MARK
A while.

JAMES
You should laugh more.

MARK
Same to you.

James is clearly thinking something over.

JAMES
You should... you should take care
of yourself... more.

Mark squints at James.
MARK
What?

JAMES
I said that... that you should worry about yourself more.

MARK
Who are you, and what have you done with my punk little brother?

JAMES
Aw, shut up, man. I’m serious.

MARK
So am I.

Mark stands, goes over to James, and puts his hand on James’ forehead.

MARK
Are you running a fever? Seeing pink elephants? Just getting drunk-philosophical?

James playfully pushes Mark away.

JAMES
Shut-up, man. I’m being serious.

MARK
Someone call Satan and warn him that hell is about to freeze over.

JAMES
I’m just saying that... that you’re gonna wear yourself out. You gotta sleep more, Mark. You gotta... get out, you know? Go hang with your friends. Go drinking with your buddies from work, or something.

MARK
You have met my partner, right? A thousand years old, no sense of humour?

JAMES
Or something. Man, I can’t be the center of your life forever.
MARK
(amused)
You’re not the center of my life, punk.

James is silent. It’s clear from the look on his face that he disagrees.

MARK
You’re not.

JAMES
You have been living in my condo, nearly non-stop, for nine weeks, bro.

MARK
That doesn’t necessarily follow.

JAMES
Have you been home at all? Even once?

Mark makes an evasive, dismissive noise and heads into the kitchen.

MARK
I thought you were going to bed.

JAMES
Oh, smooth transition. I liked that. Could barely even tell you were changing the subject.

Mark flips him the finger from behind the open door of the fridge.

JAMES
Well, then if I’m really not the entirety of your life, when’s your next date with Dr. McHottieHair?

Mark straightens, holding a beer, frowning at his brother.

MARK
Really?

JAMES
Really.

MARK
Where is this coming from?
JAMES
You’re the one who just said that I’m not the be-all and end-all of your life, so that must mean there’s someone else. Ergo, dating. And I saw the way you two avoided eye contact at my last check-in.

MARK
We weren’t avoiding eye contact!

JAMES
(laughing)
Oh my god, you’re still a shit liar. You will always be a shit liar. How did you ever become a lawyer?

MARK
Lawyers don’t lie.

JAMES
Fine, fine, you exaggerate the truth. The point is, you and McHottieHair were acting like twelve year old girls.

MARK
And that somehow equates with dating?

JAMES
(teasing)
Or are you just fucking?

MARK
James!

JAMES
Cause if you are, good for you, just spare me the details.

MARK
Oh my god. Just go to bed, you drunk.

JAMES
Seriously, bro. Have you called him?

MARK
No, I haven’t. It would be unprofessional. he’s your physician.

(CONTINUED)
JAMES
Not for much longer. One more hospital visit, and then I’m a free man.

Mark contemplates this.

JAMES (CON’T)
You deserve happiness, Mark. You deserve something good in your life. Someone who appreciates you.

MARK
(snorts)
I don’t think that’s Dr. Cummings, James. Besides, I have you, don’t I?

A beat.

JAMES
Sure. Sure you do, bro.

James goes into his bedroom. Mark flops down at the kitchen table with his beer and resumes working.

INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BENJAMIN’S OFFICE.
DAY.

James is officially in remission. Benjamin is justifiably smug about it. James is pleased but chill. Mark looks like all the exhaustion he’s been putting off for the last nine weeks has come all at once and slapped him in the face.

BENJAMIN
I’m pleased with the results. There is no sign of remain metastatic cells. If any remained after your surgery, then the chemo has entirely eliminated them.

Mark frowns and rouses himself.

MARK
You can be that certain?

BENJAMIN
Mr. Farthing, at the risk of sounding immodest, I am going to be, well, immodest. I am very, very good at what I do.
MARK
Right. Okay then.

BENJAMIN
So, we’ve just got a little bit of paperwork for you, and then you may return to your life, Mr. Farthing.

James leans across the desk to sign with a massive grin.

The twins get up, shake Benjamin’s hands, and leave.

James opens the door for his brother, and then lingers behind. He turns to Benjamin, all joviality fled.

JAMES
I just want it to be really, really clear, Doc, that I am a cop. I own a gun.

BENJAMIN
I ... beg pardon?

JAMES
Don’t break his heart.

BENJAMIN
(spluttering)
I... I’m sorry, are you giving me a shovel talk?

JAMES
I figured I better do it now, before Mum does. She’s a battleaxe.

BENJAMIN
I’m not dating your brother.

JAMES
Mark’s always gotta be told what’s good for him; I’m gonna be peeved if I have to start giving orders to you around. Stop being such a pussy.

Benjamin, agog, flaps his mouth at James, but no sound comes out. James nods once, firmly, smug, and leaves, shutting the door behind him.

Benjamin scrubs his hands through his hair, down his face, aghast. He stares in disbelief at the hydrangeas in the vase.
49.  INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.

Mark is eating lunch at his desk, tie tossed awkwardly over his shoulder.

AZITA, his assistant, a middle-aged woman of Indian descent, very competent and well put-together, is standing beside his desk with a note pad. She is marking up his calendar as he speaks around the take-out he’s shoveling into his face.

   MARK
   Ah, and since I have Thursday afternoons back, see if you can get in touch with Dobson about, um--

   AZITA
   The Okafur file.

   MARK
   Yes, Okafur. Menzel and--

   AZITA
   Tanya. With the custody?

   MARK
   Baby Raquel.
   AZITA
   Yes.

   MARK
   I want to see what Child Services has dug up about the aunt.

   AZITA
   I’ll see if he has a packet ready.

   MARK
   Great. Thanks. That’s it, I think, Azita.

Mark turns his attention back to his takeaway and the files under his carton. His assistant, however, lingers.

   AZITA
   Mark.

   MARK
   Hm? What? Yes?

   AZITA
   Mark. I have been your assistant for seven years--

(CONTINUED)
MARK (OVERLAPPING)
Oh my god. Are you quitting? Is this you quitting?

AZITA
--and I have had the privilege to call this firm my home for twenty three.

MARK (OVERLAPPING)
Please don’t quit!

AZITA
So please understand that I have the utmost respect for you when I say--

MARK (OVERLAPPING)
I can’t do this without you right now!

AZITA
--that you really need to get the hell out of here.

MARK (deflating)
What?

Azita snaps shut the calendar, reaches out and also snaps shut the lid of Mark’s laptop. She takes his lunch out of his hands, closes the boxes, and hands it back.

AZITA
Your brother is in remission. You haven’t slept in three months. I cleared your schedule for the rest of the day, and tomorrow, too. Go. Home.

MARK
But--

AZITA
Go.

Mark collects his coat and briefcase and lunch, and, dazed, leaves.

CUT TO:
INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JAMES’ CONDO. DAY.

Mark is staring at James’ front door, a little shell-shocked.

Benjamin gets out of the elevator and walks down the hall, just returning home from work himself. His attention on his phone, and so he is startled into freezing when he realizes Mark is just... standing there.

BENJAMIN
Mr... Farthing? Is... is everything all right?

MARK
(in a small voice)
My assistant kicked me out.

BENJAMIN
(snorts)
Well. It seems that there is, at last, someone you will listen to.

MARK
She told me to go sleep.

BENJAMIN
Sound advice.

MARK
(childishly)
I’m not allowed to go back for another whole day.

BENJAMIN
(amused)
Shocking.

MARK
I wasn’t even allowed to take my files. She slapped my hand. Told me to go home.

Mark blinks and looks around, then looks at the keys in his hand.

MARK (CON’T)
My house keys don’t work.

BENJAMIN
This isn’t your house.
MARK
It isn’t? Oh.

Benjamin is starting to be a bit concerned now.

BENJAMIN
Mr. Farthing? Mark? How long has it been since you last slept?
MARK
Hmmm?

BENJAMIN
Sleep. When did you last sleep?

MARK
No, no, I don’t have time to sleep. I have the... baby Raquel, you see. With her aunt.

BENJAMIN
I’m sure that I don’t see, Mark. But I know that you are in no position to help baby Raquel nor her aunt right now.

MARK
Not helping her aunt. Heartless bitch.

Benjamin puts his own coat and briefcase down on the floor in front of his own door, shoves his phone into his pocket, and comes back to stand beside a swaying Mark.

BENJAMIN
No, not the aunt then.

MARK
No. Heartless bitch.

BENJAMIN
Yes, you said that.

MARK
Not supposed to, though. Not supposed to have an opinion. All the awful things in the world, all the terrible things human beings do to each other, and I’m not supposed to feel any of it and it’s awful.

Mark’s face crumples. Benjamin gingerly removes the take out and the keys from Mark’s hands and opens the condo door.
CONTINUED: (3)

BENJAMIN
In you go, Mark. (calling out:)
James? Officer Farthing? Are you in?

No answer. Hightower comes to the door, demanding scritches. Mark tries to bend down to pat him and sways into the wall.

MARK
H’lllo, menace.

Benjamin just barely catches him.

BENJAMIN
This is absurd. I assume your guest room is this way. Come on, Mark, off we go.

MARK
S’not my cn’do.

Benjamin walks Mark toward the spare room at the end of the hallway.

51 INT. JAMES’ CONDO - SPARE BEDROOM. EVENING.

Mark flops down on the bed, face first. Benjamin allows a rare, affectionate, affected smile creep into the side of his lips. He bends down and pulls Marks shoes off.

MARK
(slurring)
Hey. Now you’re takin’ carea me.

BENJAMIN
That I am.

Benjamin creeps out of the room.

52 INT. JAMES’ CONDO. EVENING.

Benjamin finds a pad of sticky-notes on the dining room table and writes a note:

MARK WAS DEAD ON HIS FEET. LET HIM SLEEP I HAVE HIS KEYS.--Dr. Cummings

Benjamin creeps back to the door, toes Hightower away, sticks the note to the doorknob, turns off the lights, and shuts the condo door behind him.
INT. JAMES’ CONDO. DAY.

Mark looks healthy and well rested for the first time. He is curled up on the sofa in a robe and PJs with a giant mug of coffee. His hair is endearingly mussed and there are still pillow-creases on his face.

James comes in the front door. He’s been grocery shopping, and the bag is filled with all sorts of post-chemo healthy foods, and one horribly sugary children’s cereal.

MARK
Mornin’.

JAMES
Afternoon.

MARK
Whatever.

JAMES
You sound mellow.

MARK
Coffee.

JAMES
I can see that.

Mark wanders into the kitchen. He eyes the groceries James is unpacking and picks up the cereal.

JAMES (CON’T)
Don’t start.

MARK
I wasn’t going to start.

JAMES
Uh-huh.

MARK
Leave out the eggs. And those veg.
Shove over.

James makes room for Mark at the counter. Mark starts washing and chopping vegetables. He cracks eggs, seasons, whisks in milk and butter, etc..

JAMES
Lordy, lordy, what a glorious day. I’m being treated to Mark Farthing’s Famous Omelet. To what do I owe the honour?
Mark cuts him a dirty look.

MARK
We’re celebrating.

JAMES
That we are.

MARK
And you’re doing the dishes.

JAMES
Nope. I’m the man of honor.

MARK
If the man of honor can do the dishes at Mum and Dad’s house mid-chemo, then the man of honour can do the dishes at his own house when his big brother cooks.

JAMES
"Big".

MARK
Hush.

James is about to say something snide, but Mark’s phone, (lost under the papers on the dining room table), makes a noise and vibrates.

JAMES
That yours or mine?

MARK
Uh, probably yours. You know Azita won’t let anyone text me today.

The phone makes another noise/buzz, and James hunts around the condo for it.

JAMES
And that is why that woman is my hero. If she had a dick, I’d say you should marry her.

MARK
(light)
Please don’t be crude about my magical assistant.

The phone makes the noise/buzz again.
JAMES
Ah-ha! Oh, it is yours. "I just want to check in to see if you slept well."

MARK
Don’t read my texts!

JAMES
Then password protect your phone!
"Your brother retrieved your keys when he got in. I was also hoping your original offer of coffee might be..." Oh ho! Maaaark.

Mark lunges out of the kitchen and tries to snatch his phone back, and it turns into a game of keep-away. Both brothers are filled with joy, and life, and are happy with the world.

MARK
Don’t you dare!

JAMES
So you are chatting with Dr. McHottieHair after all.

MARK
We’re not chatting.

JAMES
He has your number and you invited him out for coffee.

MARK
I brought him a coffee as an apology and he texts me because I’m your primary caregiver.

JAMES
Sure, and you think he pays such special attention to all of his patients.

MARK
Are you suggesting he gave you special treatment?

JAMES
I’m suggesting he wants to give you special treatment.

Mark manages to grab the phone and immediately drops it into his underwear to keep James from snatching it back.
JAMES (CON’T)
If you think sticking it next to
your junk he going to keep me
from--

The phone dings and buzzes again, and Mark makes a
scandalized, kind of queasy face.

JAMES (CON’T)
You had the vibrate-mode on.

Mark nods. He points at the kitchen and the abandoned
omelet.

MARK
Don’t touch that.

Mark heads for the spare bedroom.

INT. JAMES’ CONDO - SPARE BEDROOM. DAY.

Mark retrieves his phone and reads the texts.

TEXT: DR. C: I just want to check in to see if you slept
well.

TEXT: DR. C: Your brother retrieved your keys when he got
in. I was also wondering if your original offer of coffee
might be available for renewal.

TEXT: DR. C: Perhaps not.

TEXT: DR. C: Or perhaps you are still sleeping?

The phone vibrates and dings in Mark’s hand, twice in quick
succession.

TEXT: DR. C: Congrats again on James’ remission. This means,
of course, that I am no longer his physician.

TEXT: DR. C: In case you were still worried.

TEXT: DR. C: Mark?

Mark waits for another text, but one doesn’t come. He opens
up the composition window, and hesitates. He writes:

TEXT: ME: Did James put you up to this?

Mark immediately deletes that. Instead he writes, and sends:

TEXT: ME: I’m awake.

The reply is nearly immediate.
TEXT: **DR. C:** Excellent! Coffee?

Mark grins like a twitterpatted school boy, then catches himself, and scrubs the smile off his face. He replies.

TEXT: **ME:** Not yet.

Again, a nearly instantaneous reply:

TEXT: **DR. C:** "Not yet" suggests "later."

Mark replies:

TEXT: **ME:** How clever of you to figure that out. Are you a doctor or something?

Mark forces himself to set the phone down on the nightstand. Then he lifts his nose into the air and sniffs. He scowls.

**MARK**

James! I told you not to touch the eggs!

Mark dashes back out into the condo.

55 EST. THE FARTHING FAMILY HOME. DAY.

Mark’s car is in the driveway.

56 INT. THE FARTHING FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN. DAY.

MUSIC: A return of the piano, violin and guitar theme, now bright and confident.

Mark, James, Diane and Oliver are standing around the kitchen table with champagne flutes and a half-decimated plate of nibbles between them. Oliver is struggling with a champagne cork. Diane takes the bottle from her husband and opens it.

Mark snaps a picture at the absolutely perfect moment, and then, slyly, as Diane is pouring the champagne, he texts it to someone.

Mark shoves his phone in his pocket, and they have a toast. James raises his glass high with his left hand, winces a little, and clinks. As they all drink, he rubs his left pec.
57

INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BENJAMIN’S OFFICE. DAY.

Benjamin is wrapping up with a client, and older woman with her daughter. The daughter is sobbing and clinging to her dying mother, but the older woman is resigned.

Benjamin sees them out, and then returns to his desk. He takes a moment to compose himself, scrubbing at his face and displacing his curls. His stoic-doctor mask has fractured and he looks heartbroken and haggard.

He pulls his phone out of his desk drawer, and opens his text messenger. Mark has sent Benjamin the champagne photo.

TEXT: MARK: (PHOTO)

TEXT: MARK: I thought you’d appreciate a Happily Ever After for your folder of Fairy-Tale memories. You defeated the dragon this time.

Benjamin checks his watch. Yes, he has time to reply.

The following text conversation happens with inter-cuts between Benjamin’s office and the Farthing Family Kitchen:

Benjamin texts:

TEXT: ME: Thank you. Very thoughtful. Is that your mother?

TEXT: MARK: Yeah, and Da in the background.

TEXT: ME: You resemble her more than him. James too.

TEXT: MARK: Yeah, it’s like we’re identical twins, or something. Strange.

TEXT: ME: Ha ha.

TEXT: MARK: (>:


TEXT: MARK: (party cracker) (stars) (champagne flute) (cake) (smug face)

TEXT: ME: Mark.

TEXT: MARK: (:P) (rude gesture) (wine) (poop) (kissy face)

TEXT: ME: (kissy face) (question mark)


(CONTINUED)
TEXT: ME: Another sibling thing that I wouldn’t understand?

TEXT: MARK: No, this is a straight-guy thing. You have straight friends, right? What wierdos.

TEXT: ME: (thumbs up)

TEXT: MARK: That’s the spirit!(champagne flute)

TEXT: ME: Are you really drinking that much? Does each emoji indicate a new glass? If so, I sincerely hope you’re not driving tonight.

TEXT: ME: Mark?

TEXT: ME: Mark?

Benjamin hesitates for a moment and then writes:

TEXT: ME: Thank you for the Happily Ever After last night. I was just defeated by the dragon, and having to tell the damsel was wretched. Your photo has reminded me why I still bother to put on my armor every day.

There is a long moment, and then Mark texts back:

TEXT: MARK: We’ll build you a whole mind-palace filled with Happily Ever Afters.

58

INT. THE MILL STREET BREW PUB. NIGHT.

MUSIC: The piano, guitar and violin shift to a faintly ominous tone.

James is out with his colleagues again. His hair is growing back in, though it’s still prickly and tufty. Ryan, is seated beside him. They both have beers, though James’ is only half finished. Ryan swigs off the last swallow of his own.

RYAN

One more?

JAMES

Uh. Naw, man. I’m good.

RYAN

You’ve turned into a health nut.

JAMES

Better late than never.
RYAN
Ha! I’m buying you another one anyway, and you have to drink it. This is your last weekend as a free man.

JAMES
It wasn’t exactly a vacation I was on, partner.

RYAN
You had four months off! Come on, on Monday you’ll be back in the cruiser with me and we’ll have to be good. Have another beer. Don’t be a pussy.

JAMES
Yeah, fine.

RYAN
There’s my man back again!

Ryan staggers to the bar. James pours most of his beer into Ryan’s empty pint glass.

59 INT. JAMES’ CONDO. NIGHT.

James staggers in the front door, drunk and feeling no pain.

JAMES
Menace?

Hightower mews, and James sticks his head into the living room to find Mark and the cat on the sofa. Mark is texting with Benjamin.

JAMES (CON’T)
Traitor.

MARK
It’s not my fault Hightower loves me best.

JAMES
You’re going to steal him when you move home tomorrow, aren’t you?

MARK
Maybe.

James makes a drunken attempt at a rude gesture. He rollicks his way up the hall toward his bedroom.
INT. JAMES’ CONDO – JAMES’ BEDROOM. DAY.

James lists in his doorway.

MARK (O.S.)
Night! Drink some water!

JAMES
Aw, fuck off, mother hen.

MARK (O.S.)
Love you too, bro!

James snorts and shoves open the door.

INT. JAMES’ CONDO – JAMES’ BEDROOM. NIGHT.

James clumsily undresses as he staggers toward the bed. He grabs a bottle of water from the nightstand and drains it.

In only his boxers, he catches sight of himself in the mirror. He has lifted his left arm to drink, and this gives him the perfect view of his surgery scar.

He switches the bottle to his other hand and steps closer to the mirror, inspecting the scar. It is small, and white, and nearly invisible under his hair.

It still freaks him out, though – his lips thin, his eyes go tight, and his hand is shaking when he puts down the bottle of water and turns to the closet.

One of his uniforms, fresh-pressed and ready to go, is in a see-through drycleaner’s bag. He pulls it out of the closet and hangs it on a hook on the back of the door.

He looks back and forth between the uniform and the mirror. He touches his abs and his arms – he’s thin, almost scrawny from his illness. He rubs a hand over his head.

He cups his pectorals and palpitates them, searching. Worried.

He drops his hands, abruptly, face shuttered.

James walks over to the safe at the top of his closet, punches in the code, and takes out the gun. He sits on the side of the bed and inspects it, taking it apart a little, looking into the barrel. The ammo is still in the safe.

He reassembles the gun and sets it down on the bedside table. He looks up at the ammo.

(CONTINUED)
From off screen, the annoying sound of a ringtone. James jumps.

MARK (O.S.)
(laughing)
Benjamin Cummings! What a surprise. Well, you’ve never called before... uh-huh. Well, yes... okay, I can see that... Oh, is this going going back to your weird phobia about shaking hands? No, you are going to have to explain it one day. Uh-huh. James? Oh, he’s passed out in his room. Had one last drunk-up with his buddies before he returns to work on Monday. Mmm-hmmm...

Through all of this, James listens at the door, smiling faintly. He turns back to the gun, scowls at it, picks it up, and puts it back in the safe.

EXT. JACK LAYTON PARK. DAY.

Unbeknownst to both Mark and Benjamin, they are currently in the same park. They are on opposite sides. Benjamin is near a ferry terminal, under a green-roof awning in his exercise gear - he’s headed to Toronto Island for a run.

Mark is walking down the tree-lined boulevard toward the terminal, the parkland on one side of him, the water on the other. He is carrying a cloth bag of produce from the harbour-front farmers’ market.

There are hydrangeas in a paper wrapper in Mark’s sack.

They are on the phone with one another, and we cut back and forth between them during this conversation as appropriate.

MARK
--moved everything back home yesterday, and of course my fridge was empty, so then I had to go to the farmers’ market.

BENJAMIN
Is it odd?

MARK
Being at home alone, you mean?

BENJAMIN
Yes.
MARK
A little. I guess? I think I miss Hightower more than James right now.

BENJAMIN
Hightower?

MARK
The cat. You know, from Police Academy?

BENJAMIN
Is that a film?

MARK
(laughing)
Oh god! Okay. Okay. As soon as I’ve managed to get my place back in order, you’re coming over. I’ll make dinner and we’ll watch the film that convinced my brother that he needed to be a cop.

BENJAMIN
I must have missed it while I was in school.

MARK
You can’t tell me you were that dedicated to your studies as kid.

BENJAMIN
I wanted to be a doctor from a very young age. I was focused.

MARK
So focused that you totally missed Police Academy.

BENJAMIN
Yes. Is that odd?

MARK
I guess not. Alright. We’ll have to fix that. Maybe we’ll have a regular movie nights, get you all caught up.

BENJAMIN
I would... I would like that. Very much. Mark.
MARK
Good. I, I would, too. Like it. I
mean. I... (laughs) God. I’ve
turned into a thirteen year old
again.

BENJAMIN
No more than I.

MARK
It’s been so long since I’ve done
this.

BENJAMIN
I have... never.

MARK
Never?

BENJAMIN
Passing stranger... you do not know
how longingly I look upon you. You
must be he I was seeking. It comes
to me, as of a dream.

MARK
Are you quoting Whitman at me?

BENJAMIN
Yes?

MARK
Was that rehearsed?

BENJAMIN
(cagey)
...perhaps?

MARK
Oh my god, you colossal dork.

BENJAMIN
Was it... was it not good?

MARK
It was fine. A but unexpected. But
fine. It was... nice.

BENJAMIN
I thought poetry was supposed to be
romantic.

(CONTINUED)
MARK
It is. It’s just... no. It was romantic. Thank you. A bit early in the proceedings, I’ll admit. But welcome.

BENJAMIN
The truth of the matter, Mark, is that I’ve... I’ve never really taken... a risk... like this.

MARK
You cut people open every day.

BENJAMIN
That is not a risk. That is a calculated procedure which I have perfected and at which I am the top of my field.

MARK
Then going to med school...?

BENJAMIN
No. My parents are both doctors, I had plenty of support and preparation, and my marks have always been extraordinary. It was hard work, but not a risk. I knew I would have no problems finding work, either because of my education or because of my skills, or because of my connections. Med school was... easy.

MARK
And I’m not.

BENJAMIN
Correct.

MARK
I’m not certain if I should be insulted by that.

BENJAMIN
What I mean is that... I find myself... questioning.

MARK
What? Me?
BENJAMIN
No, me. You care Mark, openly and easily. It comes to you naturally. And I find I have to remind myself to text you back, to say ‘thank you’, to... to make it clear, every time we communicate that you are... on my mind. That you are in my thoughts.

MARK
Relationships aren’t meant to be hard work, Ben. Don’t change who you are for me. I know who you are and what you’re like, remember?

BENJAMIN
Which is why I don’t want to just be me, Mark. I have lost, ah... opportunities before by just being myself. Nobody wants to be with that version of me. The cold, arrogant one. I want... I want you to want me.

MARK
I do.

BENJAMIN
Are you certain? Are you sure Mark? Because I... I have never felt this... this... deeply before. I have never felt this... raw. I am doing my best to be honest, to be the sort of person who deserves all your care and attention and I... if I break down these walls to allow you in and you walk away, I don’t know if I can... if I can rebuild...

Mark is stunned by this confession. He comes to a stop under a big shady tree, moved.

MARK
Benjamin...

Benjamin, scanning the park idly, spots him. Mark is shuffling a bit, nervous, unsure what to say.

BENJAMIN
Mark, are you... are you in Jack Layton park?
MARK
(confused)
Yes. Why?

BENJAMIN
I... I think I see you.

MARK
You’re here?

Mark looks in the wrong direction.

MARK (CON’T)
Where?

BENJAMIN
Turn around.

Benjamin strides toward Mark across the grass.

MARK
Ben?

BENJAMIN
Mark. Watch me. Don’t look away.

MARK
Why?

BENJAMIN
Because I am about to take a risk.

Mark’s hand falls to the side, his mobile nearly forgotten. A few paces away, Ben tosses his phone into the grass, walks right up to Mark, seizes his face between his large hands. Benjamin, now confident, swoops in and kisses Mark.

Mark seizes Benjamin’s arms and he returns the kiss. It grows passionate. And then, smirking, proud of himself, He takes a step back a little, and they remain in a half-clinch.

MARK
Well. Well.

BENJAMIN
Was that good?

MARK
Poetry and a snog in one day? I’m a lucky man.
BENJAMIN
I could make you luckier, if you like.

Mark smirks. He bends down and picks up his bags. Benjamin retrieves his phone. They walk out of the park.

INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO. DAY.

Benjamin’s condo is much, much larger than James’, and faces the water. It too is open plan, and laid out nearly identically to James’ but that’s pretty much where the similarity ends.

It tastefully appointed, nearly staged, and sterile. His furniture is mostly white, his dining room table and chairs the sort of super-expensive clear plastic kind. His furnishings are expensive, and his belongings and art are all precisely placed on shelves as if they were museum exhibits.

The men tumble in the front door, keys, phones, market backs, groceries, and sneakers flying as they tussle and snog their way toward the bedroom.

INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO - BEDROOM. DAY.

They slow down a bit once they hit the bedroom. Again, this room is extremely tasteful and wealthy. The carpet is plush, there’s a wall with a fireplace and a large flat-screen television opposite the bed, and the door to a massive walk-in closet is ajar. The bed, king-size of course, is very masculine but nearly opulent in the choice of fabrics - cashmere throw, high thread-count sheets, a muted grey jacquard duvet cover, etc.

Mark reaches up to undo the zip on Benjamin’s running shirt. Benjamin retreats a little. It’s not a recoil, but it’s a shock.

MARK
Shhhh. Shhh. It’s okay.

BENJAMIN
I... Mark...

MARK
We can... if you want... start slow... we don’t have to...

BENJAMIN
No. No, I want... I want.
He opens his arms, allowing Mark access. They undress each other slowly, and licking his lips, feeling both brave and wicked, Benjamin pushes Mark down to sit on the edge of the bed, and kneels between his legs and gives Mark a hand-job, peering up at Mark through his lashes coyly.

Mark is startled, and thrilled. His eyes flutter closed, and his head falls to the side like an overripe poppy.

INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO - BEDROOM. DAY.

Mark and Benjamin are napping, drowsy and pleased. Mark is more asleep than Benjamin, and Benjamin is watching Mark sleep through his lashes. For the first time we see a soft, natural smile on his face.

He reaches out to brush a loose hair off of Mark’s cheek, one of his own, and Mark grunts and wakes up, turns to face Benjamin. He captures Benjamin’s hand and starts kissing up his fingers.

MARK

BENJAMIN
My mother despaired that I had no musical talent. Perfect for violin. Or piano.

MARK
(smarmy, leering)
You played me pretty well, just now

Benjamin laughs and it is free, and honest.

MARK (CON’T)
Your hands are beautiful.

BENJAMIN
Thank you.

Benjamin slowly grows uncomfortable by the attention and tugs his hand away.

MARK
What is it?

BENJAMIN
Nothing, it’s fine.

He tucks his hands under his armpits and shifts, extremely awkward now. Mark sits up and studies Benjamin’s body language.
MARK
It’s not fine. What is it?

BENJAMIN
It’s... it’s not you.

MARK
Then it’s you?

BENJAMIN
No it... uhg! It’s just... it’s the... it’s something someone said, once, and it’s completely irrelevant. Shall we order in some of Thai?

Benjamin sits up and flings aside he blankets. Mark stops him with a hand on his arm.

MARK
Whoa. Slow down. Did I say something wrong?

BENJAMIN
No. Not you.

MARK
Then someone else.

BENJAMIN
It’s irrelevant.

MARK
Clearly it’s not, if it’s bugging you this much. Come on.

BENJAMIN
I don’t... you’ll just...

MARK
I won’t laugh or anything. (pause)
Okay, you don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.

Feeling rejected, Mark scooches by Benjamin and steps out of the bed, giving the camera a lovely show. He pulls on his underwear and pants. Benjamin reaches out and grabs his hand, twining their fingers.

BENJAMIN
It’s surgeons’ hands, do you see?
MARK  
(warmly)  
No. I don’t. But why don’t you explain it to me.

Mark lets Benjamin tug him back down onto the bed, and they curl around one another. Benjamin holds up his hands, spreads them wide in a shaft of sunlight.

BENJAMIN  
Surgeon’s hands. My hands are my life, Mark. I don’t shake hands. I don’t hold hands. I don’t... these are my life. And I daren’t put my life into someone else’s... hands. Do you see?

Mark grins, and rolls over on top of Benjamin. He grabs Benjamin’s wrists and pins his arms above his head, and kisses him thoroughly.

MARK  
Then I am extremely flattered that you have allowed them to fall into mine. Trust me, Ben.

BENJAMIN  
I do. I am.

Mark lets go of Benjamin’s hands so Benjamin can push Mark’s clothes back off.

EXT. MOUNT PLEASANT CEMETERY. DAY.

Mark and Benjamin are having a romantic walk through the very picturesque cemetery. Benjamin makes a point of deliberately reaching out and taking Mark’s hand.

MARK  
Bold.

BENJAMIN  
Risk-taking.

Mark pulls Benjamin along to a row of headstones that say "Farthing".

BENJAMIN  
Is this...

Mark pats the headstone of Roger Farthing affectionately. He’s smiling.
MARK
Yup. This is Uncle Rog, and that’s Aunt Nel. They came across after the war, with Nan and Grandad.

BENJAMIN
(teasingly)
That explains the faint British accent.

MARK
What are you talking about you bloody toff wanker?

They laugh and kiss.

BENJAMIN
Should you be doing this in front of your family from the old country?

MARK
Rog always told me to bring round a proper fit bloke.

More kissing.

BENJAMIN
This isn’t exactly how I envisioned meeting the family.

MARK
Oh, don’t think you’ve gotten out of it. As soon as my mother finds out you exist, you’ll be dragged to Sunday Dinner. Da still makes a tough old roast, just like his mum made.

BENJAMIN
(sarcastic)
You make it sound so appealing.

MARK
That’s the cost of being in a real relationship.

BENJAMIN
Then I suppose I will have to pay up.

Mark is thrilled to hear it, and lights up. They embrace, easy and comfortable, and Mark looks down at the graves.
MARK
Thank you.

BENJAMIN
For what?

MARK
For keeping my baby brother on this side of the grass.

BENJAMIN
For another fifty years, at least.

MARK
Good enough. Fifty more years of chasing my brother around sounds perfect.

BENJAMIN
Fifty years of being a mother hen?

MARK
Yup.

Benjamin kisses Mark again, and it is sweet, and tender.

MARK (CON’T)
What was that for?

BENJAMIN
For caring so much. For giving so much. You take care of everyone around you, Mark. I want to take care of you.

MARK
(laughing)
For the next fifty years?

BENJAMIN
Yes.

Mark didn’t realize that Benjamin was being so serious.

MARK
Okay. Whew. Okay. Well... let’s get past meeting the family before we start talking about the next fifty years, okay?

BENJAMIN
Okay.
MARK
What brought this on?

Benjamin leans out to brush the names on the headstones next to Roger.

BENJAMIN
"Muriel Harris, beloved wife, sister, and mother of three." What life did she live, do you think? Did she fight with her husband? Were their last words ones of love or hatred? Did she pass on her pie recipe before she went? But look, Mark... nothing about what she did for a living. It doesn’t say shopkeeper or maid, or CEO. Or surgeon.

MARK
Or lawyer. The important thing is that she is remembered in love. She lived in love. It’s not what she did.

BENJAMIN
It’s how she... loved. And I...

MARK
You do good things. You save lives.

BENJAMIN
But I don’t live my own. I don’t... socialize with my colleagues. I don’t talk to families. I barely call my own. I am afraid of holding hands.

He reaches out, and Mark takes his hand.

BENJAMIN
I don’t want to die. I don’t want to have to face the dragon and think, I will not be remembered in love. I’ve been wasting my life.

MARK
No.

BENJAMIN
I have. But I don’t want to. Not anymore.

They kiss.

(CONTINUED)
BENJAMIN
I have somewhere surely lived a
life of joy with you, All is
recall’d as we flit by each other,
fluid, affectionate, chaste,
matured, You grew up with me, were
a boy with me, or a girl with me, I
ate with you, and slept with
you--your body has become not yours
only, nor left my body mine only,
You give me the pleasure of your
eyes, face, flesh, as we pass--you
take of my beard, breast, hands, in
return. Mark. Teach me.

Mark laughs at Benjamin’s poetry-reciting, free and joyful.

INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY. 67

Mark has a silly "I just got laid" grin on his face. Azita
brings him a file, and grins at him and gestures to his
neck.

AZITA
Nice.

Mortified, Mark does up his collar so the love-bite is
hidden.

AZITA (CON’T)
Your three o’clock is here.

MARK
(delighted)
Ah, yes. The bi-- ...the aunt. Show
her in.

AZITA
Yessir. Also, your mum called. Your
brother said something about you
bringing someone to Sunday dinner
and she was pumping me for gossip.

Mark blushes intensely.

MARK
That meddling little asshole.

AZITA
And this is why I’m glad my sister
is still in Bangledesh. I’ve got
your reservations for Luma
confirmed for tonight, but better
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
AZITA (cont’d)
text Dr. McHottieHair and confirm
with him about Sunday before you
end up gazing into his eyes over
dessert and forget. I’ll give you
five before I show in your meeting.

MARK
(spluttering)
I don’t... I’m not... how do you
even know that nickname?

Azita laughs and exits.

68 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JAMES’ CONDO. NIGHT.

Benjamin and Mark, slightly tipsy from dinner, spill out of
the elevator. Mark heads for James’ condo, and Benjamin
steers him toward his own.

BENJAMIN
Wrong way, darling.

MARK
(snorts)
Darling?

BENJAMIN
You don’t live there anymore.

MARK
Yeah, I know, just... gimmie five. I
wanted to check in with James
about Sunday dinner and the little
punk hasn’t replied to my texts all
evening. Go, go, I’ll be there in a
mo.

Benjamin goes into his condo. Mark unlocks and opens James’
door, knocking as he enters.

69 INT. JAMES’ CONDO. NIGHT.

MARK
James? Are you in?

Hightower meows plaintively and runs out of the hallway,
chirping at Mark.

MARK (CON’T)
Hightower? Did he go out and forget
to feed you? Or did you really miss
me that much?

(CONTINUED)
Hightower immediately goes back down the hall.

MARK (CON’T)
  Huh. James?

Mark hesitates a moment, and then he follows the cat.

70  INT. JAMES’ CONDO - JAMES’ BEDROOM. NIGHT. 70
Mark opens the bedroom door.

MARK
  James? Hightower?

James is on the bedroom floor. He is utterly passed out, and his coloring is terrible. There is a small pool of blood under his head, from a still sluggishly-oozing cut on his forehead. He hit the bedside table on his way down.

MARK
  Holy shit! Ben! Ben!

71  INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - A HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY. 71
James is in the bed, hooked up to a breathing machine and looking gray. There are stitches on his forehead, in the middle of a large lump.

Mark is sitting by his bedside, holding James’ hand and staring at his brother’s face, utterly ignoring Benjamin.

Benjamin is standing on James’ other side, a labcoat over his nice dinner clothes. He is clutching his clipboard and looking ruffled and tired. He is devastated by the news he is about to impart.

BENJAMIN
  I fear, James, that the original operation was... ah... not as successful as I had... um...

  JAMES
  Promised.

  BENJAMIN
  Assumed. Cancer is a tricky beast, and even a single cell escaping our cull can...

Mark swings a furious glare up to Benjamin.
MARK
Then why did you say... why did you... you...

Benjamin is stunned by the hurt in Mark’s voice. He swallows hard, trying to reign his own emotions in.

BENJAMIN
I am rarely wrong, Mark. But rarely is not never.

JAMES
So?

Benjamin blinks himself out of his desperate staring contest with Mark and addresses James.

BENJAMIN
The reality is this - you passed out earlier, James, because you were short of breath. The breast cancer metastasized.

He holds up a medical image showing the small, deadly lumps sprinkled throughout his chest.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
This form of cancer is aggressive. From your breast tissue it spread to your lungs. As you can see, it is not limited to a small area. If it were, we could remove that lung tissue--

JAMES
I’d never be a cop again!

Benjamin stops, blinks, unsure how to address this. In the past, he would wait until the patient was finished ranting and complete his sentence. Now he looks to Mark for guidance on how to care more. But Mark’s face is turned away.

BENJAMIN
(clears throat)
Yes. Likely. But you’d have lived.

JAMES
But you said this wasn’t operable.

Benjamin opens his mouth to reply, pauses, clears his throat, fiddles with this papers, and finally, in a very small voice, says:
BENJAMIN
James. James, I’m... I’m sorry.

Mark jumps to his feet and storms out of the room. Benjamin doesn’t know what to do. He looks to James. James turns his face away.

Utterly bereft, Benjamin slips out of the room.

72
INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - A HALLWAY. DAY. 72

Mark is leaning forehead-first against the wall outside of James’ room. His fists are clenched, his whole body rigid. He is biting his lower lip so hard the skin has gone white.

Benjamin exits the room. He puts his notes into the hanging folder on the wall beside the door, and approaches Mark the way you’d approach a rabid dog.

BENJAMIN
Mark...

Mark holds up a palm, firm, commanding Benjamin to stop. Benjamin stops.

Mark leans back, eyes still on the floor, jaw tight, and says:

MARK
You were sure.

BENJAMIN
I’m sorry.

MARK
You’re supposed to be the best. You promised.

BENJAMIN
This isn’t a fairy-tale. I’m only human.

Benjamin closes the distance and puts his hands on Mark’s shoulder’s, aiming to hug him. Before he can, though, Mark shoves him back hard, against the wall. Hard enough that the painting beside Benjamin’s head rattles.

Mark is distraught and seething, his hands fisted in Benjamin’s lapels. He shoves Benjamin back again, hard, and then a third time. Benjamin doesn’t resist.

He puts his hands on Mark’s, trying to pry away his hold, and when that doesn’t work, he cups Mark’s neck, his jaw, trying to be gentle.
MARK
You asshole.

BENJAMIN
Mark.

They wrestle, Benjamin trying to soothe, to direct the grappling in a softer, more comforting direction. Mark doesn’t want to be soothed.

Mark starts sobbing.

MARK
That’s my brother. My brother.

BENJAMIN
I know. Shhh. I know. I’m sorry.

Eventually, Benjamin wins. He gets Mark wrapped up in his arms, tight and protective. Mark buries his face in Benjamin’s chest and sobs.

MARK
Don’t leave me. Not you too.
Please, please. I can’t-- I can’t.

BENJAMIN
I’m here. I’m here Mark. I’m here.
I’m staying.

They stand in the hallway, alone, the only thing holding each other up.

EXT. THE FARTHING FAMILY HOUSE. DAY.

Mark, James, and Benjamin exit the car. James is shuttered, moving on autopilot. Benjamin tries to help him up the walk but James shrugs him off. Benjamin looks helplessly at Mark.

BENJAMIN
I don’t think I should be here.

MARK
You were invited, and you said you’d come.

BENJAMIN
Yes, but that was before...

Mark narrows his eyes at Benjamin.
MARK
I need you. Please.

BENJAMIN
I can’t imagine that your parents want to meet me.

MARK
You said you’d be here for me.

BENJAMIN
I am... I just...

MARK
(angry starting to return)
Are you having second thoughts about us?

BENJAMIN
No!

MARK
Because I thought you were excited about this. About meeting my parents. About a ‘real relationship.’

BENJAMIN
Mark, please, be fair.

Mark waits for Benjamin to screw up his courage. His own anger and pain is bubbling just below the surface. After a moment, he sighs, and shrugs, trying to shake off his foul mood, trying to be the caregiver that Benjamin and his parents both need. He kisses Benjamin, slowly, soothingly.

MARK
(firmly)
This doesn’t change how I feel about you.

BENJAMIN
It should.

MARK
No. I won’t let it.
James is seated in the living room, visible by everyone in the kitchen, but turned away and focused on the television, deliberately not engaging. Benjamin is being introduced around.

MARK
... and this is my mother, Diane.

DIANE
A pleasure.

BENJAMIN
Likewise. For you.

He offers her a bottle of wine. Diane accepts it, then sticks out her hand for a shake. Benjamin shoots a desperate look at Mark misses it, focused as he is on his dad.

Benjamin screws up his courage and shakes her hand. Diane takes it after a moment of hesitation and slight panic. Her good manners win out, though. As soon as she lets go, Benjamin folds his hands behind his back.

Oliver, with twinkling eyes, reaches out and ruffles Benjamin’s hair.

OLIVER
Nice to meet you, Dr. McHottieHair.

BENJAMIN
(spluttering)
I... what?

MARK
Oh my god. Da.

Diane and Mark laugh, some of the tension broken.

Everyone has migrated to the dinner table. James is still disengaged, poking listlessly at his dinner.

Benjamin clearly wants to say something about it, but Mark squeezes his knee and shakes his head and glowers. Benjamin takes a sip of wine instead of speaking.

OLIVER
Of course, I didn’t think that when my son came out as a pouf that he’d ever bring home a pretty one again. Looks like we’re wrong.
DIANE

Olly!

MARK

(amused)

Da, I’ve told you, we don’t use that word.

BENJAMIN (OVERLAPPING)

Pouf? Pretty one?

James, for the first time, engages. He starts laughing. Everyone else laughs too, though Benjamin is a little uncertain about the Farthing family’s sense of humour.

OLIVER

Don’t give up hope now, Di. We might get those grandkids after all.

Oops. Awkward. Everyone looks at James, and he looks away, disengaged again.

MARK

(attempting levity; failing)

I could always knock up James’ girlfriend. Twins, you’d never know the difference.

James chuckles.

JAMES

I’d have to hold on to one, first, bro.

MARK

Don’t ruin mum’s dreams, punk.

They look to Diane, hoping she’ll join in, but the topic has hit too close to home. Diane is silently fuming, and finally, the dam breaks.

DIANE

(to Benjamin)

But James says you were sure.

OLIVER

Diane, you agreed that you wouldn’t bring this up.

Diane ignores her husband.
DIANE
I just don’t understand how it could have come back if you were sure.

BENJAMIN
Nothing is ever entirely certain with cancer.

DIANE
James said you were sure. You said, ‘not to be immodest’, but you’re the best.

BENJAMIN
I am also fallible. All doctors are.

MARK
(the anger suddenly returning)
Well, this is news to me!

Mark is just as shocked by what just came out of his mouth as Benjamin is hurt by it.

BENJAMIN
What does that mean?

DIANE
(harsh and loud)
Boys! Enough!

A ringing silence. James takes a breath to say something, but ends up coughing instead. It gets increasingly worse, and Mark stands to fuss at James.

MARK
Lift you arms up...

BENJAMIN
Mark, leave him. Don’t--

MARK
You shut up.

Benjamin stands and moves to help James, but Mark nudges him away.

BENJAMIN
Fussing isn’t--
MARK
I said shut up!

BENJAMIN
This isn’t my fault!

JAMES
(coughing)
Mark, fuck off.

James shoves Mark away. Mark stumbles into Benjamin, and pushes Benjamin.

DIANE
Boys!

Oliver tugs James into the kitchen, to get a glass of water. Benjamin has finally had enough, and shoves Mark back hard enough that Mark bangs into the dinner table and it skids a few inches.

DIANE
Stop!

MARK
What the fuck is wrong with you?

BENJAMIN
I tried, Mark! I tried! I did my best!

MARK
Fuck you!

DIANE
Mark!

The men watch each other warily, uncertain if the next movement will be to throw a punch. Eventually Benjamin remembers where he’s standing, whose house he’s in, and straightens. He smooths down his shirt.

BENJAMIN
I think it’s time for me to depart.

MARK
Yeah. I think so.

Benjamin walks out of the kitchen toward the front door with as much dignity as he can muster.
EXT. THE FARTHING FAMILY HOME. NIGHT

Benjamin waits by the curb, shivering in the chill evening air, for the cab he called. It pulls up and he gets in.

INT. THE FARTHING FAMILY HOME - DINING ROOM. NIGHT

Mark watches him go through the blinds. He is still angry, and panting hard. But when the taxi pulls away, he groans and scrubs at his face, miserable.

INT. JAMES’ CONDO - JAMES’ BEDROOM. DAY.

Mark helps James into his bedroom. James bats him away.

JAMES
I’m not an invalid. Not yet.

MARK
I know, I just...

JAMES
Mark.

MARK
It’s fine, I don’t mind.

JAMES
Well I do. Get out and let a man put on his PJs in peace.

MARK
Are you sure?

JAMES
Yeah. I’m fine. I want to still do all this stuff for myself while I can.

Mark makes a noise like a choked-on sob.

MARK
James.

JAMES
Mark I... I need you to promise me something.

MARK
(smaller)
Oh, god.
JAMES
Mark.

MARK
Yes, anything. What?

JAMES
Don’t... don’t tell the guys on the force what it was, okay? Don’t tell them... call it lung cancer.

MARK
But that’s--

JAMES
Come on, let a guy keep his dignity in front of his bros.

MARK
I don’t think they’ll care what kind of--

JAMES
Please.

MARK
I ... yes. Okay.

James has more to add, but he takes his time, chewing on it.

JAMES
(tentative)
Listen, Benjamin said something about palliative care, but I don’t--

MARK
Don’t bring up that asshole right now.

JAMES (OVERLAPPING)
I don’t think that--

MARK (OVERLAPPING)
I’m so mad at that smug, self-important cock that I could--

JAMES (shouting)
I can’t do it again! Mark! ...I can’t.

There is a stunned silence.
MARK
Don’t say that.

JAMES
Why not? It’s true. Mark, I’m tired.

MARK
No!

JAMES
I’m tired. I just want to sleep. I just want to... stop.

MARK
No!

James starts to shout back, but stops, sinking back to sit on the edge of his bed and press his hand against his chest.

JAMES
I’m so tired.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JAMES’ CONDO. NIGHT.

Mark slams out of the condo and stalks down the corridor to Benjamin’s. He hammers on the door.

MARK
Ben! Ben! Get your ass out here right now!

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
(through the door)
I think we’ve fought quite enough for one night, Mark!

MARK
Come back with me and tell James that he’s full of shit! Tell him that defeatist talk isn’t... I don’t know! Just come tell him something! Tell him... Tell him!

The door opens only wide enough to frame Benjamin’s face. Benjamin is confused.

BENJAMIN
What? What do you want me to tell him?

Mark grabs Benjamin’s arm and tries to lever him out the door, but Benjamin is resisting.

(CONTINUED)
MARK
I don’t know! Something! You’re his
doctor for Christ’s sake!

BENJAMIN
I thought wasn’t welcome any more.
I thought I was a liar. Well, don’t
worry, we can get your brother
transferred to another doctor in
the morning.

MARK
(pleading; lost)
Ben, please.

BENJAMIN
... no.

MARK
(furious)
You utter ass! You selfish,
unbelievable prick! You wanted to
learn how to care? Well do it NOW!
Be brave, for fucking once, and go
into that room and be human!

BENJAMIN
Don’t! You don’t get to tell me how
to handle this! I have to watch
people dying every hour of every
day at work! Don’t you dare tell me
that I have to go into
that room and watch it happen now,
too! I can’t.

MARK
You selfish -- arrogant --

BENJAMIN
Ah, yes, and now the invectives!
The cursing! The blame! This, Mark,
this is why I don’t talk to the
family! This is why I don’t get
involved! This!

MARK
I’m not just ‘family’, I’m your--

Benjamin flings the door wide, in a towering fury.

BENJAMIN
And you think that means you get
the right to--
MARK
You’re supposed to help people!

BENJAMIN
And who helps me? Hm? Certainly not you! Christ, and I wondered why I’d stayed single for so long!

MARK
How dare you!

BENJAMIN
I warned you that this is what my life was. I told you.

MARK
I knew you had to deal with this. Do you think I didn’t understand it? With what I do, every day? You think I don’t understand how terrible real life could be? How tragic?

BENJAMIN
It’s not the same!

MARK
Oh, it isn’t? Because you have fancy hospital? A lab coat? Do you think you need to have a fancy medical degree to ruin people’s lives? Because I do it every day in a courtroom!

BENJAMIN
That isn’t... that’s not what I’m saying!

MARK
I deal with the exact same shit you do, Ben, and it is. It’s shit. But this is what relationships are for! To help each other through the shit! Only I didn’t expect that you would be such a selfish bastard.

BENJAMIN
It’s worked so far!

MARK
Oh, yes, splendidly! Dr. Never-Had-A-Real-Relationship.
BENJAMIN
Unbelievable!

MARK
(quietly furious)
Or maybe this is what you like to do! Lie to all of your patients about their chances! Or just the ones you want to fuck?

BENJAMIN
(flustered; off-guard)
What?

MARK
(calm; cold)
You’re the one who said it. You fancied James, but you went for me. Why? Because I’m the easy one? That is what you said, right? Mark is easy.

BENJAMIN
Easy to care about! Everything else in my life has been hard work, and you, there was no work at all. It just happened. Easy.

MARK
(scoffing)
Or just easy to use? Mark, who cares too much... Mark, who wants to save the world! Easy enough to just let Mark take care of you, too!

BENJAMIN
(emotional; miserable)
Where are you getting this from? Did an ex...? I never said... Mark?

MARK
Shut up!

BENJAMIN
Mark, please, I didn’t mean it like that. Whatever you... you understood, I didn’t mean--

MARK
Oh god, you’re just like the rest of them. I do this every time. I do this to myself every goddamn time.
BENJAMIN
Mark, please, please don’t. I couldn’t plan on this. I didn’t. I didn’t want it to happen but it has. And I still... I lo--

Benjamin stops himself before he says it. He stands in the doorway, distraught and feeling helpless.

Mark’s dangerous calm slowly becomes a real one, sad and quiet.

MARK
This is fucking shit.

BENJAMIN
It always is.

Mark laughs, but it’s weak and self-deprecating.

MARK
I... I think I see why you... makes you feel braver when you can treat it like a fictional creature. A dragon to slay.

BENJAMIN
You’re scared.

MARK
Damn straight I am.

BENJAMIN
It wasn’t a question.

The two men stare at each other for a long moment. After a few seconds the misery and accusations evaporate, and Mark and Benjamin become aware of how close their anger has brought them to one another.

Mark takes a deep breath, and Benjamin sways closer, as if his mouth is magnetized and is seeking Mark’s.

They don’t kiss so much as rest their faces against one another’s. Benjamin reaches up and pats back Mark’s hair back, soothing and intimate.

Mark’s face crumples. He starts to shake, gulping down on sobs.

BENJAMIN
Shhh, shhh. Come inside.

(CONTINUED)
MARK
I... I can’t... James. I want you to...

BENJAMIN
There is nothing I can do, Mark. He needs the comfort of family. Not a doctor.

MARK
I... I don’t know...

BENJAMIN
Go check on him, make sure he’s okay, and then come here and I’ll take care of you.

Mark snorts wetly at Benjamin’s thin attempt at innuendo.

MARK
I don’t need someone to take care of me.

BENJAMIN
Yes. You do. Go on.

They separate slowly, reluctantly, like cold molasses.

MARK
I don’t... know. What to say to him.

BENJAMIN
He’s likely asleep.

MARK
And if he’s... not?

BENJAMIN
You can’t pep-talk your brother out of this, Mark. You can care all you like, but it doesn’t change... that reality is shit.

Mark wipes his nose and nods.

Benjamin swoops in for a quick, hard kiss. Then he steps back and closes the door, but leaves the deadbolt out so it doesn’t close all the way.
Mark pokes his head into James’ room. James is indeed asleep. Hightower is curled up by his hand. The cat perks up and meows at Mark. Mark puts a finger over his lips and shushes the cat.

Mark goes into the kitchen, and pours himself a glass of water from the tap. He takes a moment to pace around, drink, and breathe. He is clearly reviewing the conversation and starting to regret what he said. He pinches the bridge of his nose and hisses:

MARK
God, Mark. You’re a real winner.
Asshole.

He puts his glass in the sink.

Mark sits on the end of the sofa, away from Benjamin, but Benjamin tugs at him until Mark is laying back against his chest. Mark hands Benjamin a glass and then takes his own. They cheers softly.

MARK
I’m afraid of spilling something. Why on earth do you have a white sofa?

BENJAMIN
It makes the room look larger. James is asleep?

MARK
Yeah. Yeah, I ... I want to apologize.

BENJAMIN
There’s no need.

MARK
But I--
BENJAMIN
It’s not the first time I’ve taken the brunt of someone’s fear.

MARK
Yeah, but you’re not just James’ doctor, you’re my...

Mark wrinkles his nose in distaste.

BENJAMIN
Lover?

MARK
Boyfriend. I just hate that word. It’s juvenile. We’re two grown-ass men with advanced degrees.

BENJAMIN
Partner.

MARK
I have a partner, and I run the firm with him.

BENJAMIN
Then I’m afraid boyfriend is the only option.

MARK

Benjamin splays his hand against Mark’s chest and rubs in circles, soothing. Both sip their brandy.

MARK (CON’T)
I also want to apologize for my mum.

BENJAMIN
You don’t--

MARK
But I do. You know I... and she didn’t mean them either. Not really.

BENJAMIN
Of course you meant it. Anger makes people more honest, not less.

Mark sets down his brandy and turns around to kneel between Benjamin’s legs. He cups Benjamin’s face in his hands.

(CONTINUED)
MARK
You have a right to protect yourself. However it is that you have to do it, to... stay sane. To keep it all separate...

BENJAMIN
Mark, you don’t have to--

MARK (OVERLAPPING) No, listen. I’m an asshole. My mother’s an asshole. This isn’t about us, and this doesn’t involve you. We’re disappointed. That’s not your fault.

Benjamin squirms, uncomfortable.

BENJAMIN
If I’d insisted on more tests, I might have... I hate wasting hospital resources, and James looked good. He was... I could have caught it earlier, I could have--

Mark cuts him off with a kiss.

MARK
I’m mad. I’m furious. But I can’t... I’m not Mum. I can’t blame you. I need you... Ben, I need you and I can’t... please...

BENJAMIN
I’m here. You can have me, I’m here.

Mark surges against Benjamin, pinning him down, rolling his hips and devouring Benjamin’s mouth. The next lines are delivered between bruising, biting kisses:

MARK
I’m so angry.

BENJAMIN
I know.

MARK
I want someone to blame.

BENJAMIN
I know.
MARK
I want... god, I hate... I hate...

BENJAMIN
I know. I... ah!

Mark starts biting down Benjamin’s neck, hands yanking at Benjamin’s belt.

MARK
You’re such a fucking prick.

BENJAMIN
Mark!

MARK
You’re arrogant, and self-important...

BENJAMIN
Mark...!

MARK
I could kill you.

He presses up and wraps his hands around Benjamin’s neck. Just hard enough to be threatening, but not hard enough to cut off Benjamin’s air.

BENJAMIN
I would let you.

MARK
I could kill you for what you’ve done to James.

BENJAMIN
Do it.

MARK
(startled)
What?

Benjamin leans up, straining so Mark’s thumbs are pressed hard into his windpipe.

BENJAMIN
Go on.

MARK
No!

(CONTINUED)
He jerks back, horrified. He puts his hands on Benjamin’s tented knees. Ben surges up and wraps his hands into Mark’s hair and bites his lip, hard.

**BENJAMIN**

Punish me. Hate me. Use me, Mark. I’m yours. Whatever you want.

Mark and Benjamin tussle for control of first the kiss, then to dominate. Mark shoves Ben into the corner of the sofa hard, yanks his pants and underwear down and shoves up his shirt.

Mark slides down the sofa, yanks and shoves and wrestles Benjamin’s legs up until they are hooked over Mark’s shoulders.

Benjamin flails and whines, reaching behind him and digging his fingers into the arm of the sofa.

This isn’t a blow job, it’s a *claiming*. Mark says a line each time he pauses for a breath:

**MARK**

I can’t... I can’t loose you... too.

**BENJAMIN**

You won’t. Never. Mark... *Mark*.

**MARK**

I don’t care what anyone thinks. You’re *staying*. You’re *mine*.

**BENJAMIN**

Yes! ... *mARK*!

Benjamin comes hard, arching and wailing. Mark sits up, licking his lips, and then finishes off his brandy in one swig to kill the bitterness. He is breathless, shocky, surprised at his own aggressiveness.

He is blinking, startled. When Ben finally comes back to himself, he leans up, wraps himself around Mark from behind, and slides one of his hands around Mark’s throat, the other one down his pants.

**BENJAMIN**

My turn.

He grins wickedly.
EXT. CITY STREETS. DAY.

Mark and Benjamin are strolling, hand-in-hand down the street. They each have a coffee in their other hands. They are a handsome couple, both in their sharp blazers and ties, on their lunch breaks.

BENJAMIN
I’ve begun the paperwork to have myself removed as James’ primary care oncologist.

Mark, whose mind had been on the display in the window beside him, whips his head around.

MARK
What?

BENJAMIN
It’s a conflict of interest.

MARK
But... you’re the...

BENJAMIN
Mark. There’s nothing left to do but the paperwork.

Mark nods shakily, biting his lip, and looking away. He takes a sip of coffee, and his grip on Benjamin’s hand tightens.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
I’m sorry.

He reels Mark in for a sweet, consolatory kiss.

INT. THE FARTHING FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Mark, James, Diane and Oliver are standing around the kitchen island, reviewing paperwork. James slides onto a bar stool, a little winded. They are reviewing end-of-life care documents, James’ will, and funeral arrangements. James pours himself a heavy tumbler of whiskey, and Diane breaks away from the paperwork to pull down three more tumblers. James dutifully pours.

The doorbell rings.

Mark, startled, looks at his watch.

(CONTINUED)
Mark realizes at the last moment how awkward this is going to be.

DIANE
You made plans to leave early?

MARK
Mum, most of this is already settled. I thought...

DIANE
Your brother--!

MARK
Is sitting right there. I know the papers, Mum. I drew them up. I didn’t think you’d mind--

DIANE (OVERLAPPING)
I’d mind--?

MARK
Sorry!

The doorbell rings again.

JAMES
Go on.

MARK
Are you sure?

JAMES
Dumbass. Go.

Mark, relieved to have at least his brother’s blessing, gathers his coat and briefcase, leaving the papers and folder, and goes.

Diane and Oliver share a silent conversation in which she expresses her extreme displeasure as they overhear:
MARK (O.S.)
Hi. Sorry. Hello.

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
I can come back if you’re in the middle of-- mmm.

They’re kissing. Diane stares at her husband in disbelief.

DIANE
The doctor?

MARK (O.S.)
What’s this? Flowers? I know you’re new to this but I’m not actually a fifteen year old girl.

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
They’re for your mother, you magpie.

There is a hissed, quiet conversation that the occupants of the kitchen can’t quite make out. They hear Mark sigh, and then footsteps coming toward them.

MARK
Fine. This way.

They enter the kitchen. Everyone tenses. This is not a comfortable second meeting.

BENJAMIN
Hello, again, Mrs. Farthing. Mr. Farthing.

OLIVER
Oliver, please.

Oliver moves to shake Benjamin’s hand, trying to be friendly, but Diane pins him in place with a withering glare. Oliver drops his hand and steps back.

Benjamin hands a fresh bouquet of hydrangeas to Diane. After a pointed hesitation, she takes them.

DIANE
(tightly)
Thank you.

Benjamin has another, small arrangement of blossoms still in his hand, and this he pins to Mark’s lapel, gentle and intimate. He has something to prove to Diane.

(CONTINUED)
BENJAMIN
Perhaps I am not dating a fifteen
year old girl, but you must allow
me a small touch of romance.

Mark laughs and kisses him softly. Benjamin smiles against
his mouth. Oliver is amused and James is watching with a
smug smirk, the gaze of a matchmaker triumphant. Only Diane
is displeased with this display.

MARK
Mmm. That damned adorable curl
right there.

He tugs the curl on Benjamin’s nape teasingly.

BENJAMIN
Ready?

MARK
Yeah. I can’t read this stuff any
more. James, do you want a ride
home? Ben’s gotta swing by his
place and change before we go out.

James is silent. Watching his brother has tumbled him back
into his dark mood. He throws back his drink.

MARK (CON’T)
James...?

Benjamin touches his arm and shakes his head. Mark sighs.

MARK (CON’T)
Okay, call me if you change your
mind. I can still swing by.

DIANE
James will be staying here tonight.

It’s said with such finality that it gets Mark’s hackles up.

MARK
Will he?

Mark cranes his head to see if James is agreeing with their
mother. But he is still ignoring them.

MARK (CON’T)
Right. Fine then. Bye Da.
OLIVER
Bye. Have fun! Use a condom!

Benjamin snorts and laughs.

BENJAMIN
I see where your brother gets it.

MARK
(mortified)
Oh my god.

The lovebirds head for the door.

85
INT. THE FARTHING FAMILY HOME - FOYER. NIGHT.
85

Benjamin steps outside, and Diane stops Mark just before he follows. She pulls him back inside.

MARK
Mum!

DIANE
I don’t like this!

MARK
Mum--

DIANE
I mean it! He’s cavalier, and arrogant... James...

MARK
This has nothing to do with James.

DIANE
Of course it--!

But Mark is fed up with her attitude.

MARK
You know, mum, for once something can be about me!

DIANE
(aghast)
Mark!

MARK
I mean, Jesus. I know he’s dying, I know, I know it’s terrible, but maybe you could spare half a thought for me, you know? "Marky" (MORE)
MARK (cont’d)
takes care of Jimmy, and Jimmy has such a scary job, he’s a cop! I’m so worried about him. When will he get a wife? when will he give me grandkids?” Have you ever worried about me?

DIANE
I hardly think this is an appropriate time--

MARK
Then when, Mum? When are you going to start worrying about my happiness? Now? Or are you going to wait until James is dead?

It’s a low blow and Mark regrets it as soon as he says it. Benjamin steps back into the house and takes Mark’s hand, comforting.

BENJAMIN
Mark...

Mark gestures to Benjamin.

MARK
James is happy for me! At least there’s him!

DIANE
I can’t believe you’re asking me to… of course I want you to be happy, but is this really the right time to be--

MARK
Well, right now, right this second, Benjamin Cummings makes me happy! And lord knows things aren’t easy for him right now either, but he’s here for me, at least. He cares. It’s novel.

Mark pulls Benjamin out the door, and slams it shut behind him.

Diane is not a hard-hearted bitch, and we see her conflicting vulnerability as she tries to compose herself before returning to the kitchen.
INT. BANNOCK RESTAURANT. NIGHT.

Mark and Benjamin are seated at a nice little booth in the corner. They already have wine. Appetizers have been eaten, judging by the small, empty, crumb-speckled plates in front of them.

Mark is fingering his boutonniere and grinning.

MARK
You’re ridiculous.

BENJAMIN
And you are a romantic.

MARK
I’m the romantic?

BENJAMIN
It’s one of the things I love best about you.

Mark looks up, a bit twitterpated by the ‘l’ word.

MARK
(softly)
There were hydrangeas... in the hallway. Where we first... where I was waiting.

BENJAMIN
Were there?

MARK
Yes. (teasing) Did you steal my mum’s bouquet from work?

BENJAMIN
No. I chose them because these are what you bought the day we kissed the first time.

MARK
Did I? I suppose I picked them because they reminded me of you.

Mark leans across the table and they kiss again.

MARK (CON’T)

MARK
(into Benjamin’s mouth)
You remembered what flowers I bought on the day we first kissed.

(MORE)
MARK (cont’d)
I’m not the only romantic sitting at this table.

Benjamin laughs and they sit back. Mark has a small emotional moment, blinking and looking away. Benjamin is instantly concerned.

BENJAMIN
Mark?

MARK
I’m... fine, just... uhg, gimme a second.

BENJAMIN
You are not fine. Do you feel-?

MARK
No, I’m okay. I’m okay.

He turns back to Benjamin and smiles. It is watery, and weak, but genuine.

BENJAMIN
Do you want to... to talk about it?

Mark laughs.

MARK
You don’t have to sound quite so distasteful there, Dr. Cummings.

BENJAMIN
(disgruntled)
Sorry, I... be patient with me, Mark, I--

MARK
I’m teasing.

Benjamin makes a displeased sound. Mark reaches across the table to take his hand.

MARK
Sorry.

BENJAMIN
I am trying.

MARK
I know. And I appreciate it.
But Benjamin is genuinely frustrated and won’t be put off by platitudes.

BENJAMIN
Maybe your mother was right.

MARK
What? About what?

BENJAMIN
About me. If you’re not even willing to tell me what--

MARK (OVERLAPPING)
Whoa, whoa. Slow down, there. What do you mean by--

BENJAMIN
You just lied to me, Mark.

MARK
I’m choosing not to tell you something that upset me, that’s not lying!

BENJAMIN
Something you’re thinking about has made you sad and you won’t share it with me. Partners are supposed to share--

MARK
There’s no rule book.

BENJAMIN
I am trying.

MARK
I know.

BENJAMIN
But if you won’t even tell me what makes you sad, how am I supposed to help fix it? How am I supposed to... to be... Mark. I... I want this. I want this so badly but if I can’t... if I can’t...

Mark reaches across the table and kisses Benjamin quiet. It is hard and comforting at the same time. When they finally pull apart, Benjamin’s eyes are screwed shut. Mark strokes Benjamin’s cheek until he opens them.
MARK
Sorry. I’m sorry.

BENJAMIN
Please let me help.

MARK
It’s not as easy as that, it’s... you can’t fix every sad thing in my life, Ben.

BENJAMIN
That doesn’t mean I don’t want to try.

Mark takes a moment to chew on that. He sits back and sip his wine, then presses his thumbs against his eyes, taking a deep, brave breath.

MARK
I was thinking about... us getting married.

BENJAMIN
(distraught)
And that made you sad?

MARK
James won’t be there.

Benjamin is quiet, digesting this.

MARK (CON’T)
If I ever thought about myself getting married, my baby brother, my twin... he was my best man. In here.

He taps his temple.

BENJAMIN
I see.

MARK
You understand why I didn’t want to talk about it?

BENJAMIN
Yes. I wish you still had, without me badgering, though.
MARK
I’ll do better next time. I’ll try.

BENJAMIN
Thank you.

They are silent for a moment. Benjamin is angry at himself.

MARK
Now it’s your turn to share. What’s wrong?

Benjamin struggles for a moment.

BENJAMIN
This is all my fault.

MARK
My mum--

BENJAMIN
It’s not just your mother, Mark. If I had been... less sure of myself. Less arrogant.

MARK
You don’t know that. You can’t.

BENJAMIN
How many other people have I put at risk, Mark? How many others--

MARK
Shhh. Shh. Sweetheart. You can’t think like that.

BENJAMIN
I remember them. All of them.

MARK
Right. Your perfect recall.

BENJAMIN
Every face. Every person who looked up at me in hope. Every tear. Every time I dismissed their concerns as hysterics? Every request for assurance. How many did I fail, while being so sure I had succeeded?

Benjamin is overcome by this thought, and covers his eyes with his hands, choking back desperately on the emotions that threaten to escape.
Mark shifts his chair around and cuddles Benjamin close, soothing.

MARK
Oh, Benjamin.

Benjamin presses his fist against his heart.

BENJAMIN
It hurts.
MARK
I know.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE THAI PLACE. NIGHT.

Benjamin and Mark are walking hand-in-hand toward Benjamin and James’ condo building. It’s been a rough emotional evening, but they are happier for it.

BENJAMIN
I... I wanted to say that... if there is a wedding--

MARK
(groaning)
Oh god, what have I started.

BENJAMIN
At least you will know that James approves of me. Dr. McHottieHair indeed.
MARK
Hmm, yeah.

BENJAMIN
In that way, James will be there.
MARK
That’s true.

They reach the outside of the condo building.

BENJAMIN
Will you come up?
MARK
Oh god, yes.
Benjamin opens his front door. Hightower peeks his head around and meows pitifully, bumping his head against Benjamin’s leg.

Mark is understandably surprised.

MARK
Hightower?

BENJAMIN
Ah, yes, I meant to tell you. James, ah... asked me to take him.

MARK
I... you?

BENJAMIN
Is there some reason why he wouldn’t ask me to pet-sit?

MARK
Pet-sit, Ben... I think James is giving you his cat.

BENJAMIN
Why would he...?

MARK
I don’t know. I mean, if I’d thought about it, and I’ll admit that I hadn’t, I assumed James would ask me.

Mark looks over at James’ door.

BENJAMIN
Are you upset?

Mark snaps his attention back around.

MARK
What? No. No, I’m just... confused. Listen I... Go inside. I’ll be right back.

BENJAMIN
Mark?

MARK
I just... I just want to check up on James.

(CONTINUED)
BENJAMIN
Your mother said he was staying at their house.

MARK
(snorts)
Yeah, right. You clearly don’t know James very well, then. I’ll be right back, okay?
BENJAMIN
Okay.

They kiss, and Mark jangles his keys out of his pocket.

INT. JAMES’ CONDO. NIGHT.
Mark opens the front door and enters.

MARK
James? Are you home?

The condo is spotless. It is eerie.

Mark looks around, confused. There’s an envelope with Mark’s name written in a shaky hand propped up prominently on the dish where Mark and James usually leave their keys. Underneath, underlined, it says: "I’m sorry".

MARK
Oh my God. James!

INT. JAMES’ CONDO – JAMES’ BEDROOM. NIGHT.
Mark runs into James’ bedroom.

James is sprawled across the bed. Well, what’s left of him is. What is left of him? There is a spray of blood across the wall. His gun is still in his hand.

Mark walks forward calmly. He is the careful, caring big brother for one last time.

Mark takes the gun from James’s hand. He steps back and unloads the magazine with quick, sure movements. He drops the gun and magazine on the floor.

Then he reaches out to... comfort James.

Only, James is beyond comfort.

Forever.

When the truth hits Mark, he finally, finally breaks down.
Mark screams.

EXT. MOUNT PLEASANT CEMETERY. DAY.

The violin, piano and guitar return, plaintive and mournful.

The screen stays dark for an uncomfortably long time, slowly, slowly coming up on:

The Farthing family gathers around an open grave, watching James’ coffin is being lowered into the ground. Around them, Toronto’s Finest salute James one last time.

The day should be gray and rainy, but it’s not. It’s high summer. Everyone sweats in their best clothes.

It’s hateful.

INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BENJAMIN’S OFFICE. DAY.

Benjamin is busy doing paperwork. He signs a document with a flourish, closes the folder, files it, and moves on to the next.

It’s labeled JAMES ROGER FARTHING. His hand starts to shake as he tries to lift the cover. He can’t.

He turns away, picks up his phone, and moves to the window. He scrolls through his text messages, re-reading:

TEXT: ME: I haven’t heard from you in a few days. I wanted to check in. I won’t ask if you’re okay. But have you eaten? Have you slept?

TEXT: MARK: I’m staying with Mum and Dad. The neighbors have given us enough casseroles to last an apocalypse. Azita has barred me from the office.

TEXT: ME: That’s not an answer. Are you eating? Are you sleeping?

TEXT: MARK: There’s no time. Paper work and things to settle with insurance, and his work, and the condo.

TEXT: ME: I can help with the condo. I can pack. Or something.

TEXT: MARK: I’m fine.

Mark hasn’t replied. Benjamin dithers, and then after checking his watch, calls Mark.

(CONTINUED)
The call rings through, and nobody picks up. Benjamin leaves a voice mail:

BENJAMIN

Mark? It’s... it’s me. Obviously. I just... have you slept? Have you eaten? I worry. I know... I know the funeral was today. I assume you’re at your parent’s now. I just... call me. If you want. I’m here for you.

Benjamin hangs up. He sighs and scrubs his face, and covers his mouth to keep from crying. Now that he’s let himself feel something for Mark, he doesn’t know how to handle the emotions.

There are no hydrangeas in the vase.

93  INT. A CORNER STORE. NIGHT.  93

Benjamin is buying groceries. He stops in the pet aisle and buys cat food and a small catnip mouse.

94  INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO. NIGHT.  94

Benjamin unlocks the door, sets down his bags, and makes a kissing noise. Hightower skitters around the corner and rubs against his legs.

BENJAMIN

(melancholy)

Hello, menace.

The hydrangeas that Mark bought are withered, sitting in a mason jar on the hallway credenza.

95  INT. THE FARTHинг FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN. NIGHT.  95

The wake is winding down.

Friendly, open Mark is felling bitter and dark. He has secreted himself in the corner. He pulls out his phone to look at the very same text-conversation that Ben had contemplated earlier. He writes:

TEXT: ME: I MISS YOU.

Then he deletes it, shoves his phone in his pocket, and goes to the counter to pour himself a whiskey.
INT. MARK’S TOWNHOUSE - OFFICE. NIGHT.

Mark stumbles into the house, alone, and waves off the departing cabbie. He’s a wreck.

He stumbles into his home office, where there is a swanky credenza with showy crystal. He picks up the no-doubt expensive whiskey, flops off the stopper, and quaffs. There is a mirror above the bar set up.

He looks into it. James looks back.

His face crumples and he sinks onto the carpet, distraught.

INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.

Azita stands in Mark’s office, idly tidying his desk, the phone squeezed between her ear and shoulder. It’s ringing.

   BENJAMIN (O.S.)
   Hello, Dr. Cummings.

   AZITA
   Good afternoon, Dr. Cummings. My name is Azita. I’m --

   BENJAMIN (O.S.)
   Mark’s PA, yes.

   AZITA
   I’m calling because... is Mark with you?

   BENJAMIN (O.S.)
   I assume this means he’s not picking up at home?

   AZITA
   He’s not there, then. Okay. I’m getting in a cab.

   BENJAMIN (O.S.)
   I’ll do it.

   AZITA
   Dr. Cummings...

   BENJAMIN (O.S.)
   It’s fine. I’ll do it.

   AZITA
   Thank you.
Benjamin hangs up. Azita considers the phone, face creased with worry.

INT. MARK'S TOWNHOUSE - OFFICE. NIGHT.

Benjamin is knocking loudly on the front door, calling to Mark through the wood. From the office, it’s just muffled thumping and shouting.

Mark is passed out on the floor, a pool of vomit under his cheek.

The thumping stops. There’s a moment of quiet, and then the sound of a body tramping through a bush. The light of a cell phone shines through the window.

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
Yes, Azita, I’m around the side now. Uh-huh. His office is on the ground floor, you said. Hold on...

Benjamin appears at the window. He looks around the office, using his phone as a flashlight.

BENJAMIN (CON’T) (O.S.)
I don’t see-- ah, fuck. No, no. I see him. He’s breathing. I think he’s just drunk... Yes, that is my medical opinion. Is there an alarm system? ...Because I’m going to break the window. Okay. Thank you. Goodnight.

Benjamin hangs up, puts his phone in his pocket, and searches the garden. He ducks out of frame. He and returns holding a whimsical garden gnome dressed like a lawyer, white wig and all.

He smashes the window pane near the latch.

Mark stirs and rolls onto his back, groaning.

Benjamin gropes for the latch, finds it, wraps his hand with his scarf to protect it from broken glass, then raises the sash and wriggles into the room.

Mark groans louder and sits up.

MARK
Ben’jmn?
BENJAMIN
Oh, my poor Mark. You silly, silly man.

INT. MARK’S TOWNHOUSE- BATHROOM. NIGHT.
Benjamin strips Mark efficiently and manhandles him into the shower. We see a lot of skin but it’s not sexy, it’s vulnerable.

INT. MARK’S TOWNHOUSE - KITCHEN. NIGHT.
Mark’s hair is wet, and he is in his pajamas and housecoat. He is seated at the breakfast bar and holding his head.

Benjamin stands between the breakfast bar and the sink, his shirtsleeves rolled up and damp.

Benjamin sets a glass of water and two aspirin down by his elbow. Mark groans.

BENJAMIN
No nonsense. Finish it all.
Mark groans again.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
I know a seven year old with leukemia who is more cooperative than you. I manhandled you into the shower. Don’t think I’m not above pinching your nose and pouring it down your throat.

Mark cuts a dirty glare at Benjamin but scoops up the pills and swallows them, then drains the glass. Benjamin takes it and immediately refills it, then hands it back.

MARK
Coffee?

BENJAMIN
Water first.

Mark pouts but drinks.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
I can’t believe your fucking parents let you go home like this.

MARK
Snuck out.
BENJAMIN
You snuck out of your brother’s wake.

MARK
Couldn’t stand being... being alone.

BENJAMIN
There were dozens of people--
MARK
No. Alone.

He looks pointedly at his reflection in the night-darkened window. Benjamin gets it. Mark is no longer a twin.

Mark slumps and buries his head in his arms. Not knowing how to do this, Benjamin dithers for a moment, the mask fracturing, and then he comes around to Mark’s side of the island and wraps Mark in his arms like a shield.

BENJAMIN
Oh, my darling. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.

MARK
I couldn’t stay there. Mum kept banging on about how she... blamed... and I can’t listen to... I lo-love you...

Mark sniffles and sobbs a little, and Benjamin kisses the top of his head. It’s not how he wanted to hear Mark say it the first time, but he’ll take it.

MARK (CON’T)  
(sobbing)  
How co-could she s-say that...?

BENJAMIN
I told you, Mark. Every fairy-tale needs an old-fashioned villain. It makes people feel better. I don’t mind.

MARK
Of course you do. You always have.

BENJAMIN
Yes. Of course.
Benjamin curls in tighter around Mark. Mark pushes him back, and Benjamin is hurt and startled for a moment, until Mark stands and wraps his arms around Benjamin’s neck and squeezes them so close together there’s barely enough room for breath.

MARK
Don’t leave.

BENJAMIN
No. Never.

MARK
Promise.

BENJAMIN
Yes.

Mark pulls back and kisses Benjamin hard. It’s too hard. Benjamin reaches up, tries to gentle the kiss, and Mark bites him.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
Ouch!

Mark dives back in for more, but Benjamin holds him away, licking blood off his lip.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
No. Not as punishment.

MARK
What? No, I don’t--

Mark sees the blood. He winces.

BENJAMIN
Mark.

MARK
Sorry.

BENJAMIN
Mark.

Mark leans up and kisses him soft, apologetic, licking the blood away.

MARK
I’m sorry. I’m sorry.
Mark kisses down Benjamin’s chin, across his jaw, over his collarbones, murmuring endearments and apologies and pleas never to leave. Benjamin lets his head fall back and his hands curl in Mark’s bathrobe and just holds on.

Mark backs Benjamin up to the living room sofa, pushes him down and crawls on top. Sex is semi-clothed, rough and desperate, and clinging, like they’re afraid to let their mouths part in case one of them is ripped away.

This isn’t rough angry sex. This is desperation. This is starvation.

Buttons go flying. Mark gets his own trousers just far enough down for Benjamin’s hands to curl around and dig between his cheeks.

Mark rides Benjamin and it is jerky, swift, his orgasm over too soon and hitting too strong. Mark gasps and arches, digging his ass into Benjamin’s pelvis, and the gasp becomes a sigh, and then a choke, and then a sob.

Mark curls down against Benjamin’s chest. Ben pulls the blanket from off the back of the sofa, wraps them both up warm, rocking and cradling his lover.

MARK
I can’t... I can’t do it...

BENJAMIN
Shhh. Shhhh. I’m here.

MARK
James said he was tired. He was so tired. I’m so tired, Ben. I can’t do it.

BENJAMIN
You can. You can. It will pass.

Mark sits up abruptly, aghast.

MARK
I don’t want it to pass! I don’t want to stop missing him!

BENJAMIN
I know. You never will, I promise. But you’ll see. It will get...

MARK
(sneering)
Better?
BENJAMIN
Duller. Number.

MARK
What am I, if I’m not a big brother? Who am I, if I’m not a twin?

BENJAMIN
Mark Farthing. Lawyer. Care-er. Defender of the weak, voice to the voiceless. Mine.

MARK
I’m no one. I’m useless.

BENJAMIN
That’s not true.

MARK
I’m nothing.

BENJAMIN
Baby Raquel doesn’t think so. And I’m certain the bitch aunt must be thinking of you as well, though not highly.

Another sob escapes Mark. He is surprised and touched by Benjamin’s kindness.

BENJAMIN
I don’t think so.

Mark cuddles back into Benjamin, weeping, and Benjamin holds him tight.

101 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BENJAMIN’S OFFICE. DAY.

It is the end of the day. Benjamin is putting away his files, and donning his coat as he talks to Mark on the phone.

BENJAMIN
I have to swing by mine to feed the cat, and then I’ll be over.

MARK (O.S.)
The cat. I forgot about Hightower.

There is silence for a moment. Mark realizes something:

(CONTINUED)
MARK (CON’T)(O.S.)
Shit. James knew I’d forget about the cat.

BENJAMIN
It’s fine. Hightower is fine. Perhaps annoyed that I don’t cuddle him as much as you do.

MARK
I should... I should take him back. Take him off your hands.

BENJAMIN
(stiffly)
If you want to.

MARK (O.S.)
Do you want me to?

BENJAMIN
I’d rather not.

MARK (O.S.)
(gently)
Is it a comfort thing? This is... what you want after you spend a day ruining people’s lives?

BENJAMIN
You once said that you understood what that was like. Do you?

MARK (O.S.)
You remember that?

BENJAMIN
I remember everything. You said that I was a prick who thought I had a monopoly on how hard life was because I had a hospital and a lab coat? You asked if I believed that I needed fancy medical degree to ruin people’s lives, because you do it every damn day in a courtroom.

MARK (O.S.)
Jesus. That’s eerie.

BENJAMIN
You called me a selfish bastard.
MARK (O.S.)

Ben, I--

BENJAMIN
No. Don’t apologize. I deserved it. That’s why I want to ... keep the cat.

MARK (O.S.)
Okay. Okay.

BENJAMIN
I’ll pick up Thai on my way past. I remember your order. From that... that first night.

MARK (O.S.)
(startled)
I thought you weren’t paying attention to me then.

BENJAMIN
Of course I was. I told you. You’re gorgeous. I envied James for your compassion. And you were easy to love.

A moment of silence from the other end of the line.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
Mark?

MARK (O.S.)
How about I call the Thai place ahead so you don’t have to wait for the order?

BENJAMIN
Perfect.

INT. MARK’S TOWNHOUSE. NIGHT.

Benjamin, now with a key, enters the house. He sets the Thai food bags down in the kitchen.

BENJAMIN
Mark?

MARK (O.S.)
In my office!

Benjamin sheds his outerwear, leaves it on the sofa, and goes into the office.
INT. MARK’S TOWNHOUSE - OFFICE. NIGHT.

Mark is vacuuming up broken glass. There is cardboard over the hole in the window, but now the mirror above the bar is shattered as well.

Benjamin frowns at it. Then he crosses the room and grabs Mark’s hand. There is blood and glass on his knuckles.

Benjamin shuts off the vacuum and pulls Mark back into the kitchen.

INT. MARK’S TOWNHOUSE - KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Benjamin pushes Mark into the stool at the breakfast bar, turns on the tap, and pushes Mark’s hands under the flow. Benjamin rummages under the sink for the first aid kit.

BENJAMIN
Where is the... do you have a...?

MARK
Above the fridge.

Benjamin pulls the first aid kit out of the cupboard above the fridge. He shuts off the tap, grabs the tea towel off the stove, and pats Mark’s hands dry. He then starts tweezing glass out of Mark’s skin.

MARK
Smells good.

He leans towards the bag of food.

BENJAMIN
And you can have some once I’ve finished here.

MARK
Ben...

Benjamin points the tweezers at Mark’s face.

BENJAMIN
No whining. You’re the one who wanted me to hurry up and you’re the one delaying dinner.

MARK
Ben.

(CONTINUED)
BENJAMIN
Couldn’t you have just covered the
mirror instead?

MARK
That’s a little Victorian.

BENJAMIN
So is punching glass because your
reflection reminds you of your
brother.

Mark pulls away. Benjamin grabs his wrist and pulls him back.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
Oh no. No. You wouldn’t let me stay
an ass and I won’t let you shut off
on me.

Mark grumbles and snags the bag with his free hand, pulling it close. He peers inside. Just as he’s about to reach in, the front door opens. Oliver steps inside, followed closely by Diane.

Everyone freezes where they are, eyeing each other up.

DIANE
I see. So has he taken your phone
away, or just convinced you to stop
answering?

MARK
What?

OLIVER
(chiding)
Diane.

DIANE
You were gone, Mark. You just
vanished. And you weren’t answering
your phone.

BENJAMIN
(snide)
Ah, and I notice it took you two
you a full forty-eight hours to
give a fuck.

Diane is appalled by Benjamin’s outburst. He’s a little
startled himself, but he’s angry enough to that it doesn’t
matter. Mark stands, suddenly in the middle of something
that he doesn’t quite understand.
DIANE
You shut up!

BENJAMIN
Or what? You have literally nothing to threaten me with!

DIANE
James--

BENJAMIN
Is dead!

Shocked silence all around. Benjamin knows he shouldn’t have said it, but he’s gone too far to back down now.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
(furious)
So perhaps you should stop mourning the son you’ve lost and pay attention to the one you still have!

MARK
(horrified)
Ben!

DIANE
Get out! Get out you selfish, cruel--

BENJAMIN
Cruel? Me? I’m the one who peeled your drunk son out of a pool of his own puke! I’m the one who’s trying to get him to eat! I’m the one who’s holding him when he sobs and rocking him to sleep! Where the hell have you been?

Diane raises her hand to slap Benjamin. Mark grabs her wrist, jaw clenched. Diane looks at him, startled, betrayed, then back at Benjamin, bitter.

Benjamin isn’t triumphant, though. He’s staring at Mark, pity in his face. Mark shakes his head once.

MARK
You better go.

BENJAMIN
I should sa--

Mark turns his head to face Benjamin.
MARK
I meant you.

Benjamin is startled. Then hurt.

BENJAMIN
Yes. Of course.

He fetches his coat, stiffly, and storms out the front door.

105 INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO. NIGHT.

Benjamin sits on the sofa eating cold cereal and petting Hightower.

106 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BENJAMIN’S OFFICE. DAY.

Benjamin is in his office. He is swamped, swapping out files before he rushes off to see another patient. He is in scrubs, hair under a net, preparing to head into surgery. There is a knock at the door.

BENJAMIN
(snaps)
Yes? What? Come in!

MAN IN A SUIT
Dr. Benjamin Cummings?

BENJAMIN
Yes! What? I’m busy!

The man in the suit hands him a manila envelope.

MAN IN A SUIT
You’ve been served, Dr. Cummings.
Have a nice day.

Benjamin stares at the envelope in his hands, dumbfounded.

BENJAMIN
What?

107 INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.

Mark storms into his office, followed by Azita and his PARTNER - a puffing, balding man in his sixties who hasn’t worn a properly fitted suit since the first Trudeau era - and behind them, both of his parents.

(CONTINUED)
MARK
You did what?

PARTNER
Your mother asked me to lead the case, as it would be a conflict of interest for you, so of course I said I wo--

MARK
A malpractice suit? On what grounds?

DIANE
(coldly)
Incompetence. Negligence.

MARK
You can’t charge Ben for that! He’s the top of his field!

DIANE
He is arrogant, and rude, and his lack of empathy and negligence killed your brother!

MARK
James ate his own service pistol!

Diane’s rage breaks through.

DIANE
And that is your little fling’s fault!

MARK
My little... Jesus, Mom.

Mark is literally reeling, and he slumps back against his desk.

PARTNER
Mark. Mark. I’m going to need your help with--

MARK
(flinty)
No. Absolutely not. Drop the case.

PARTNER
What?

(CONTINUED)
DIANE
No.

MARK
Drop the case, mum.
DIANE
No.

They are at an impasse.

PARTNER
Mark, should I not have...?

MARK
No.

DIANE
I am paying twice your usual fee. Think of all the pro bono work you could do with that.

MARK
Do you think I care about the fucking money, Mum?

DIANE
I think you don’t care about your brother! Or the other people that have suffered like him!

MARK
I can’t. I can’t listen to this. I can’t be a part of this. (To Partner:) Drop the case.

PARTNER
We stand a good chance of winning. I’ve already spoken to—

Mark puts up his hand, silencing his partner.

MARK
I can’t be listening to this. I can’t be a part of this.

PARTNER
Mark?

MARK
She’s your client. Not me. Not our whole family. You leave me out of this.
Mark pushes away from the desk and storms out of his office.

108 INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO. DAY.

Benjamin is seated on the sofa, stunned. He is still in his scrubs, he hasn’t changed. Mark is kneeling between Benjamin’s knees, cupping Benjamin’s face in his hands.

MARK
I didn’t know she’d do it.

BENJAMIN
Malpractice?

MARK
Ben...

BENJAMIN
Negligence.

MARK
Ben, please.

Mark makes a grab for Benjamin’s hand, but Benjamin recoils, cradling his hands against his chest, protective.

MARK (CON’T)
I... I wouldn’t...

Benjamin stands, staggering away from Mark, turning his back, and over to the window. Hightower jumps up on the sill and Benjamin nearly pets the cat, then hesitates. He puts his hands behind his back instead.

MARK (CON’T)
Listen, it will take them a few weeks to arrange for the experts to--

BENJAMIN
She already has. The hearing date is set. I was reaching out to you, and you were ignoring me, and she was plotting.

MARK
Benjamin, please. I didn’t have anything to do with it. You can’t think that.

BENJAMIN
But you won’t do anything to stop it, either.

(CONTINUED)
MARK
I can’t intervene in this! The
judge would... the conflict of
interest alone would...

BENJAMIN
Shut up!

Mark is flabbergasted.

BENJAMIN
I am nothing if I am not a doctor,
Mark. I have wanted literally
nothing else, my whole life.

MARK
(small; lost)
What about me?

BENJAMIN
Get out.

Mark, hurt beyond words, stands.

BENJAMIN
And take this fleabag with you.

He shoves Hightower off the sill. The cat yowls at him.
Benjamin stalks out of the room, and off screen, his bedroom
door slams.

INT. MARK’S OFFICE - A BOARDROOM. DAY.

Day one of the case. The boardroom room is a little shabby,
and is populated with Oliver, Diane, Mark’s Partner,
Benjamin, Benjamin’s REPRESENTATIVE, a COURT
TRANSCRIPTIONIST, and a JUDGE. It is tight, and hot in the
room and nobody is happy.

JUDGE
If there’s no further
administrative concerns, then we’ll
begin.

He opens a file.

JUDGE (CON’T)
We are here to review evidence and
discuss settlement or dismissal for
the malpractice suit leveraged
against Dr. Benjamin Cummings of
Princess Margaret Cancer Centre by
the defendants Oliver and Diane
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

JUDGE (CON’T) (cont’d)
Farthing, in regards to the
negligent treatment of their son
James Roger Farthing, which
resulted in his death.

Benjamin opens his mouth to protest, but his representative
shakes his head, swift and tight, and Benjamin clenches his
jaw and says nothing. The judge continues.

INT. MARK’S TOWNHOUSE – KITCHEN. DAY.

Mark is not at work. He is sitting at his breakfast bar,
staring at his phone and ignoring his cup of coffee. The
phone pings. He grabs it up and reads a text:

TEXT: ARZITA: It’s started. It doesn’t look good.

Mark chucks the phone at the wall and it bounces onto the
floor.

INT. MARK’S OFFICE – A BOARDROOM. DAY.

It’s clear that the Farthing family money and influence is
going a long way, especially since Ben has no friends at the
hospital. A medical expert, a FELLOW DOCTOR from Princess
Margaret’s, is sitting in the hot seat. Benjamin is slumped,
staring out the window, defeated already.

FELLOW DOCTOR
He’s always been a cold, arrogant
bastard.

REPRESENTATIVE
Objection! We asked for a medical
opinion, not a character
assassination.

JUDGE
Sustained. Doctor, answer the
question.

FELLOW DOCTOR
(smug)
Was the appropriate medical
standard of care applied under
the circumstances? Yes. But only
barely. Dr. Cummings can’t get out
of a patient’s room fast enough. I
have no doubt that his desire to
avoid contact with the patient’s
family affects his attention to
detail.

(CONTINUED)
PARTNER
You’re saying that Dr. Cummings routinely breeches the medical standard of care?

FELLOW DOCTOR
In my medical opinion? Yes.

DISSOLVE TO:

The sun is setting outside the office windows.

Ben is slumped, barely listening as the judge pronounces him stripped of his medical license. The sound of the judge talking is muted, muffled, in slowmo and agonizing.

The guitar and violin weep.

JUDGE
--stripped of his licence. Dr. Cummings may not practice medicine within the territories and dominions of Canada--

Benjamin looks at his phone. There is a single text.

TEXT: MARK: It will be fine. We’ll figure it out.

Benjamin deletes the text.

JUDGE
--the amount of two point seven million awarded to the defendants--

Benjamin stands and walks out of the room, as if through molasses, not waiting for the rest of the judge’s pronouncement.

112 EXTERIOR. PARKING LOT OUTSIDE OF MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.

Benjamin shuffles out into the brutal sunshine. He strips away his tie and lets it flutter away on the wind. He tips his head back, swallowing the light.

Mark, who has been waiting on a bench nearby, pushes to his feet and comes to stand beside Benjamin.

MARK
I’m sorry.

BENJAMIN
It’s over. It sort of feels good.
Now that it’s over.

(continues)
Benjamin raises his hand to silence Mark.

BENJAMIN
No.

Benjamin walks away. Mark stands frozen, helpless, watching him.

Slowly, the rest of the team files out the door. Diane and Oliver spot Mark and approach him.

DIANE
(smarmy)
Mark! What a pleasant--

MARK
Shut up!

OLIVER
Mark!

MARK
Not another fucking word. From either of you. You... you vultures. James would be ashamed of you.

DIANE
Young man!

MARK
Don’t! I am ashamed of you! I hope you’re happy with your blood money! You’ve stripped a man of everything he was!

DIANE
Why do you care? He doesn’t want to see you anymore! Don’t pretend that he matters to you! Look, he just walked away!

MARK
You think that I only care about other people when it serves my interest?

DIANE
I... no, of course not... but what else could you see in that sociopathic prick?
MARK
How about a man who desperately, desperately wanted to be loved?
How about a man who wanted to do good? A man whose heart was so open, and so filled with other people’s pain that he had to pretend to be a sociopath just to fool himself into going back into work every day?

DIANE
He killed your brother!

MARK
Breast Cancer killed my brother! The only thing Ben did wrong was be sure of himself! People make mistakes, mother! It happens! That’s life!

DIANE
I can’t believe you’re defending him!

MARK
Of course I am! You’ve just done to Ben what the cancer did to James! You took away his livelihood, his identity, his everything. I wouldn’t be surprised if Ben--- oh. Lord. Benjamin.

Mark runs across the parking lot in the direction that Benjamin took.

113 INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO. NIGHT.

The door is unlocked, and Mark crashes through it.

Benjamin is sitting on the living room floor, a half-drunk bottle of whiskey by his knee and a tiny parade of pill bottles around his feet.

Benjamin, as it turns out, is a bit of a jolly drunk.

BENJAMIN
Ah. Mark! Do you know what one of the perks of being a doctor is?
Pills.
MARK
Benjamin... please... please
don’t...

BENJAMIN
Why not? It all seemed to work out
for James, in the end.

MARK
Don’t... don’t say that.

BENJAMIN
Why? Is it too honest?

MARK
It’s... this... it’s not a
solution, Ben.

BENJAMIN
(darkly)
Isn’t it? What makes you so sure?

MARK
Wasn’t it you, just a few days ago,
telling me that it will all pass?
It will get better? Go on, you’re
the one with the impressive memory.
You tell me.

BENJAMIN
Fuck you.

MARK
Please.

BENJAMIN
You can come closer. It’s okay.
It’s not a loaded gun. I can’t
shoot you with pills.

MARK
This is... this is selfish and
horrible.

BENJAMIN
Only from where you’re standing.

Benjamin laughs as if it’s the funniest joke he’s ever told.
But his laughter grating, his face flushed and desperate.

Mark starts stuffing the pill bottles into his pockets.

Benjamin is a bit too drunk to be coordinated enough to stop
him, though he still tries.
When Mark has all of them he runs to the washroom.

INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO – BATHROOM. NIGHT.

Mark starts dumping the pills into the toilet, flushing frequently.

     BENJAMIN (O.S.)
     Hey!

Mark roots through Benjamin’s medicine cabinet, and yanks out any pills he finds there, too. Benjamin stumbles into the bathroom, tugging on Mark’s hand.

     BENJAMIN (CON’T)
     Stop it.
     MARK
     No!

     BENJAMIN
     This isn’t fair!

     MARK
     Isn’t fair? Isn’t fair? You unbelievable prick! You selfish goddamn asshole!

     BENJAMIN
     Ah. And there they are. The invectives.

     MARK
     How could you... how could you do this to m-me? Again?

     BENJAMIN
     To you? What the fuck does this have to do with you?

Benjamin swerves out of the doorway and staggers back to the living room.

INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO. DAY.

Benjamin is searching for his whiskey bottle. He finds it and swoops in on it, swinging it up and finishing it off in one go. Mark follows and yanks it out of his hands.

     BENJAMIN
     Oh. Is Mark the Caregiver back again, then?

(CONTINUED)
MARK
Stop this!

Benjamin wavers in the living room, listless.

BENJAMIN
I’m going to have to sell it.
Everything. I don’t... Even with the
Malpractice insurance, I’ll have nothing
to live on after. I don’t have that
kind of money.

MARK
Benjamin...

BENJAMIN
How could you let them do it?

MARK
I didn’t... Ben. Please just...
just sit down, okay? I’ll get you
some water and we can--

BENJAMIN
(suddenly sober; enraged)
Why?

He snarls it. Mark, startled, takes a step back and stumbles
over the coffee table.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
Why should I? If I’m not a
doctor, then what am I, Mark? What
good am I to the world? What good
are these hands?

MARK
They were good enough to hold me!
They were good enough to love me!
Or is that not enough?

BENJAMIN
It was a mistake. Letting you in.
Letting you... ruin me.

MARK
(furious now)
You... what, liked being just
a machine?

BENJAMIN
Yes! And I was good at it! I was
fine when I was that! But you...
you, Mark Farthing, you got under
my skin and you ruined everything!

(CONTINUED)
Mark, hurt, backs away.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)

Get out! Get out of my life!

Instead, Mark grabs him from behind, holding on for dear life. Mark whispers into the nape of his neck, mourning already.

MARK

We’re no good for each other, are we?

Mark wrestles Benjamin around to face him. Benjamin grabs a fistful of Mark’s hair. Mark winces but doesn’t resist.

BENJAMIN

I can’t take care of you.

MARK

I never asked you to.

BENJAMIN

I wanted to. I wanted... so badly. Couldn’t save James... maybe just... because you deserve someone to love you the way you... you... Mark...

MARK

I’m here, Ben. I’m here.

BENJAMIN

(weeping)

I can’t...

MARK

I know.

BENJAMIN

I wish...

MARK

I wish I could take care of you the way to you deserve, too.

BENJAMIN

Love you.

MARK

It’s not enough.
BENJAMIN
Say it anyway. Please.

MARK
I love you, too.

They kiss. Both men are raw, desperate, groping towards some semblance of closure in each other’s mouths. They kiss, slow and sad. Mark starts backing Benjamin toward the bedroom. Benjamin doesn’t resist. They kiss like a goodbye letter.

INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO - BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Mark lets Benjamin press him down onto the bed and strip him bare. Their mouths barely separate, even to pull Mark’s tie over heads and undo buttons.

Benjamin’s professional life is in shambles. Mark is estranged from his family. All they had left is each other, and even that is disintegrating. They know it.

It won’t be enough, they can’t be enough, and much as they love each other, it isn’t their time. This is their last hurrah.

It is at first angry, then rough, then apologetic, then sorrowful, then comforting, then passionate in rapid succession.

It is their whole relationship in a nutshell and it is a bridge from before to after.

When Benjamin drops off to sleep, Mark kisses his temple, and then slips out for the last time. He takes the whiskey bottle with him when he goes.

EXT. MOUNT PLEASANT CEMETERY. DAY.

Mark is sitting on the ground, leaning back against James’ headstone. He pours out a measure of whiskey for James, then takes a gulp himself.

MARK
It’s over with me and Dr. McHottieHair. We couldn’t... I know you wanted someone to take care of me, James, but we just couldn’t survive... you. We weren’t strong enough. I wasn’t good enough. I’m sorry. I tried.
INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO – BEDROOM. DAY.

Benjamin wakes slowly. He reaches out for Mark, and finds only a crumpled pillow. He pulls it to his face and inhales. He indulges for a moment. When he sets the pillow aside, his eyes are wet.

He fishes around for his trousers, finds them, and pulls out his phone. He searches his contacts, then finds who he’s looking for. He calls.

BENJAMIN
Hello. Good morning. Yes. Is Misha there? Thank you. Good morning, Misha. Yes. Thank you – yes. Well, funny you should ask. I have decided to sell the condo. I know, it hasn’t even been five years. Well. It’s time for a change.

He flops back onto his bed, exhausted.

INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.

Mark is at work, and he is furious to be there. His phone is ringing and he is not picking up. Azita sticks her head in the office.

AZITA
They’re going to keep calling until you answer.

Mark looks down at his office the phone. The call display says FARTHING.

MARK
Fuck her.

He hits the ignore button. Azita withdraws.

EXT. JACK LAYTON PARK. DAY.

Benjamin tries to go for a run. He passes the tree where he and Mark snogged. He freezes, startled. Then he scowls. He just turns around and goes home.

INT. BENJAMIN’S CONDO. NIGHT.

Benjamin’s still in his running gear. He is sitting in front of his computer, researching Doctors Without Borders.
INT. CORPORATE OFFICE. DAY.

Ben is doing an interview. The INTERVIEWER is the deeply tanned, bit scruffy, crunchy-granola type.

INTERVIEWER
The malpractice suit doesn’t bother us too much, Dr. Cummings. We reviewed the files and have determined that the opinion of a bereaved family has to be taken into account. What we’re more concerned with is the intense specialization you’ve had the last ten years.

BENJAMIN
Say what you really mean, please.

INTERVIEWER
Are you going to be light enough on your toes for this?

BENJAMIN
I am a highly skilled surgeon. I chase dragons for a living. I have always been very creative. I will cope. More than that, I will thrive.

The interviewer is impressed.

INTERVIEWER
One last question, Dr. Cummings. Why Doctors Without Borders? Why leave your safe city? Why leave all this...

He gestures to the office around them, referring to the luxury. Benjamin takes a moment to answer, and when he does, his words are low, slow, and breathtakingly honest.

BENJAMIN
I met a man who taught me how important it is to care. I can no longer work here, but I am still a Doctor. I can put his lessons to use elsewhere. I can show the world that I’ve learned. I can show him.

The interviewer nods, stands, and offers Benjamin his hand to shake.
EXT. MOUNT PLEASANT CEMETERY. NIGHT.

Benjamin visits James’ grave. The whiskey bottle is where Mark left it, and empty.

Benjamin bows his head and folds his hands.

   BENJAMIN
   I’m sorry. I failed you. It won’t happen again. I promise.

He leaves.

INT. A PLANE - FIRST CLASS. DAY.

Benjamin, looking slightly sick to his stomach, fastens his seat belt.

INT. MARK’S OFFICE. DAY.

Mark reviews the paperwork one last time, and then signs the papers that confirm that James’ condo has officially been sold.

Azita knocks on the door and sticks her head into the office.

   AZITA
   If you’re finished, I can arrange a courier to deliver the keys.

   MARK
   No, I’d... I’d like to do this in person.

   AZITA
   Mark, you... you should know that the cheque came in today.

   MARK
   Hm? Which cheque?

   AZITA
   Your parent’s settlement.

Mark’s face shutters. He stands, collects the papers, and a set of keys that are laying on the blotter, and scoops up his coat.

   MARK
   I’ll be an hour, or so. Take a long lunch, if you like, Azita.

(CONTINUED)
AZITA
Sure thing, boss.

She steps out of the door way and lets him pass, then closes it after him.

126 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JAMES’ CONDO. DAY.

Mark exits the elevator and meets a REALTOR at James’ door. They exchange paperwork and keys, and then shake hands. The Realtor leaves.

Mark hesitates, then reaches out and brushes his hand across the door handle.

As he turns away, he sees Benjamin’s front door close. He is halfway across the hall before he remembers that Benjamin doesn’t live there anymore.

There is now a doorplate that says SUMMERS under the peephole.

Mark shoves his hands in his pockets and turns away, sullen.

127 EXT. A VILLAGE IN AFRICA. SUNSET

Benjamin, sunburned and wearing a ridiculous floppy hat, sits on a rise overlooking the village, and pens a dusty, beat up journal for Mark.

BENJAMIN (V.O.)
Day sixty-four. Mark, you’d be very proud of me. Today I cut the head off the chicken myself. For all that I am an excellent surgeon (and I am, don’t laugh, I can hear you all the way from here), I have always been squeamish when it comes to butchering my own supper. Well, no more! Abidemi is patient with my horrific Yoruba lessons, and continues to show me the ways he uses the teas I described a few days ago for pain management...

128 MONTAGE. LIFE GOES ON.

We cut back and forth between their lives.

BENJAMIN - is doing good in Africa. We see him in the surgery hut, hands out for a suture needle, holding a leg that is now a bloody stump as a woman screams; we see him sweating in the harsh sun, lifting bricks and building

(CONTINUED)
schools; we see him eating in a group; we see him taking his turn hauling water from a well; and more important than all of that, being humble, as the local doctor shows him medicines, etc. He grows steadily more tan, and he has stopped shaving.

MARK - in the meantime, is a pale shadow of his jovial self. He is doing the daily grind to work and home again; we see him sitting listlessly on the streetcar; he comes into work and only nods at Azita in greeting; we see him pushing the food around on his plate at home, alone; we see him sitting on his sofa and setting Hightower back on the ground, not in the mood for a cuddle; we see him ignoring calls from his mother; and we see Azita, watching him, worried.

INT. A COFFEE SHOP. DAY.

Mark is seated in a coffee shop, dressed casually but reviewing work notes all the same. He looks up, catches sight of his own reflection in the window, and pauses.

MARK
(to himself)
Hello, James.

The man at the table beside the window - ROLAND, early 30s, attractive and dapper, but shy - startles and looks around, then turns to Mark.

ROLAND
Um. Sorry. Were you talking to me?

MARK
Huh? What? Sorry. No! Sorry, I...
uh, never mind. Sorry.

ROLAND
Are you James?

Mark is struck by this question. He was asked this thousands of times through his life, and he hasn’t heard it in over a year. He is unexpectedly verklempt.

MARK
Oh, ah... no... I’m...

ROLAND
Oh, jeeze, I’m sorry, are you okay?

Roland shifts over to Mark’s table and proffers an honest-to-god handkerchief. Mark looks at it and laughs.

(CONTINUED)
MARK
Really?

ROLAND
Call me old fashioned, but you know... there’s something romantic about a handkerchief. Classy, you know?

MARK
Romantic. Yeah.

ROLAND
Here.

MARK
Do I... am I supposed to give it back now? Because to be honest, that’s a bit gross.

ROLAND
You’re supposed to keep it, and then launder it, and then promise to return it to me.

MARK
And how am I supposed to do that? I don’t know your name, or your phone number.

Grinning, Roland produces a pen, takes Mark’s hand, and writes his name and number on the back of it.

MARK (CON’T)
Oh. Very smooth. Bravo... (reading) Roland.

Roland laughs, pleased with himself.

130  EXT. A VILLAGE IN AFRICA. DAY.

Ben is still writing the journal for Mark. He is sitting beside a makeshift soccer pitch, watching the children play, under the eaves of the newly-built school and their meager shade.

BENJAMIN (V.O.)
Sometimes it seems silly to be writing to you, Mark. I don’t know if I will ever have the courage to
BENJAMIN (V.O.) (cont’d)
send this to you. Maybe it’s just for me, proof that I was really touched by you. That I am trying. I want you to be proud of me. I am going home in exactly two months. I have nothing waiting for me there. Except, maybe you. I don’t know. I can hope. You said, before, that we were no good for one another. I remember that. And at the time you were right. But perhaps next time, we will be good for one another. I can only hope.

A soccer ball bangs into the wall beside him. The children giggle. Benjamin tucks his journal into his back pocket and launches himself at the pitch, after the ball. The children scream and laugh, scattering.

131 EXT. JACK LAYTON PARK. DAY.

Roland and Mark are shopping at the farmer’s market together. They hold hands and laugh.

Roland picks out some hydrangeas. Mark, startled, shakes his head.

MARK
No. No, um. Those ones.

Mark points to some roses instead.

ROLAND
But... your art. In the house. You prefer hydrangeas, don’t you?

MARK
Not anymore.

Roland buys them both boutonnieres of roses instead, and puts it in Mark’s blazer button hole. They kiss, and, holding hands, walk past Mark and Benjamin’s snogging tree. Mark barely falters.

132 INT. A PLANE - ECONOMY. DAY.

A tanned, scraggly, scruffy Ben is returning to Canada. He is writing in his journal.

BENJAMIN (V.O.)
There is suffering greater than I could have predicted in the world,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
BENJAMIN (V.O.) (cont’d)
Mark. More than I ever saw in my operating theatre at the hospital. More, I expect, than you have ever seen in your courtroom. But you got me through it. You have been my imaginary friend, and my goal, and Jimminy Cricket, Mark. I love you. I am done playing the villain. It is time to be the knight in shining armor. You won’t appreciate being compared to a damsel, but I hope to win your hand anyway. I have no riches, no banner, nothing but a heart at is all yours. Humble. And hoping.

133 INT. A CRAPPY HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM. DAY.
Ben showers. His time in Africa has been both kind and harsh. He has a lovely tan, and his musculature has definitely got more definition, but he’s too thin.

134 INT. A CRAPPY HOTEL ROOM - BEDROOM. DAY.
Ben dresses. His clothing is clean and neat, but more casual than we’ve ever seen him dress in Canada – just slacks and a nice sweater, with loafers.

The excitement is building. He rushes out into the hall, then has to come back for the notebook. Dangling from the spine of the book, he even has a little African cat toy for Hightower.

135 EXT. CITY STREETS. DAY.
It’s a gorgeous day and it matches Benjamin’s mood as he dashes to Mark’s townhouse.

136 EXT. OUTSIDE OF MARK’S TOWNHOUSE. DAY.
Roland and Mark return to the townhouse with their haul from the farmer’s market. They are being kissy and adorable on the sidewalk.

Benjamin, at the end of the block, draws up short. In one swift stroke, he is utterly devastated.

It’s Roland who spots him first.

ROLAND
Mark? Do you know him?

(CONTINUED)
Mark turns around. He gasps, and drops his groceries. His expression fills with longing, and hunger, and relief, and love, and lastly sadness.

ROLAND (CON’T)
Mark?

MARK
(strangled)
I... it’s...

Roland cuts a glance between the two of them, and then nods, slowly.

ROLAND
(disappointed)
I see. It’s one of those things, huh?

Mark snaps back to reality when he registers Roland’s tone.

MARK
Roland, please, don’t--

ROLAND
No, no, I get it. It’s fine.

MARK
It’s not fine, it’s... he’s...

ROLAND
(firmly)
Mark. I will go to the wine store and get something to go with our amazing farmer’s market dinner, okay?

Mark, understanding that Roland is offering him space, nods.

ROLAND
Get that stuff in the fridge. I’ll be back in a few hours.

MARK
It doesn’t take a few hours to get wine.

ROLAND
I’ll make it.
Roland pulls the head off one of the roses and tucks it in Mark’s buttonhole. Then he kisses Mark firmly. Perhaps it is a goodbye kiss, Mark isn’t certain. He searches Roland’s face as he pulls away, but Roland’s expression is jovial and at ease. If he’s hiding something, he’s doing it well.

Roland skips down the steps and turns down the street, in the opposite direction of Benjamin.

Mark looks up the street and locks eyes with Benjamin. He nods slowly, just once.

Mark picks up their bags, opens the front door, and goes inside. He leaves the door ajar. Benjamin sprints down the street.

INT. MARK’S TOWNHOUSE. DAY.

Mark puts the bags on the counter, and begins to sort the produce. Some things go into the fridge. Some stay on the counter.

Benjamin slips in the door and closes it softly behind him. Hightower comes out of the hallway and curls around Benjamin’s legs. Benjamin bends down to offer the cat a scritch and the toy.

   BENJAMIN
   (fondly)
   Hello, menace.

In the kitchen, Mark drops a bundle of cauliflower. He braces his hands on the side of the counter, head bowed, trembling.

   BENJAMIN
   Hello, Mark.

   MARK
   (voice shaking)
   Benjamin.

   BENJAMIN
   (awkward)
   That was... um...

   MARK
   My boyfriend.

   BENJAMIN
   (gently)
   Such a juvenile term.
Mark makes a gasping, choked, nearly laughing sound. He is too shaken up, too shocky, to really giggle.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
You look well.
MARK
You too.

BENJAMIN
You haven’t even looked at me.

Benjamin is staring at Mark like a parched man at an oasis. His gaze begs Look, look, please Mark. Look at me.

Mark is scared. He is scared to look at Benjamin, and he is scared not to. He is scared what might happen if he looks. He is scared that Benjamin might vanish if he doesn’t.

Slowly, trembling, he turns around, eyes on his feet. He braces himself back against the counter, as if expecting a blow, and then inch by agonizing inch, raises his eyes.

Benjamin is smiling, softly, strained. His posture is loose, but his hands are held out at his sides, a little, fingers spread wide, sort of like "tah dah, here I am."

Mark gulps and presses a fist against his mouth. He coughs and swallows hard.

MARK

BENJAMIN
Lots of sun in Africa.
MARK
Africa?

BENJAMIN
Doctors Without Borders.

MARK
(surprised)
Really?

BENJAMIN
I once knew a man who told me that I needed care more. I decided to give it a try.

Mark blinks hard, trying to hold back tears.
MARK
Why... why are you here?

BENJAMIN
Where else would I be?

MARK
We said... we were done.

BENJAMIN
I love you.

Mark jumps. He picks up the cauliflower, puts it in the sink, slams on the water, scrubs at his head, turns off the water, paces in a circle, rubs his face, and then faces Benjamin again.

MARK
You can’t say that. You can’t just say that.

BENJAMIN
Why not? It’s true.

MARK
(moans)
Benjamin...

BENJAMIN
I love you Mark. I never stopped.

Benjamin takes a step forward, arms open to embrace and Mark jerks away, arms up to hold him back. He takes a few, shaky steps away.

MARK
Don’t.

BENJAMIN
But--

MARK
Don’t.

BENJAMIN
Mark.

MARK
Jesus! Fuck! Let me process this for a second, okay?
BENJAMIN
Process what?

MARK
I thought you hated me.

BENJAMIN (startled; hurt)
What?

MARK
The way you left! I thought... I thought you never... ah, fuck.

Mark turns away again, pacing, taking deep breaths, thinking.

BENJAMIN
I see, then. No. No of course you didn’t wait for me. I... quite right.

Benjamin pulls the journal out of his jacket pocket and sets it down on the little side table beside Mark’s reading chair.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
All the same. This is yours. And I still love you.

MARK (bursting)
Fuck, don’t say that!

Mark, furious and hurt and confused and having no idea how to take any of this, rounds on Benjamin.

MARK (CON’T)
Did you think I would just wait for you? Just put my life on hold? You left, Ben! You went to the other side of the planet and I only knew you were even gone because I made an arse of myself by knocking on your door! A stranger answered!

BENJAMIN
You went to my condo?

MARK
The day we showed James’. Less than a month! And you were gone. That was a pretty blunt clue! No subtly there. We were finished.
BENJAMIN
I... I didn’t mean...

MARK
Well what did you mean, then? What did you mean by it, when you left, with no forwarding address, no information? Doctors Without Borders! There are... there are landmines! Hideous diseases!

BENJAMIN
(sardonic)
Which is why I went.

MARK
You could have died over there! You could have died and I would... I would never have heard. You could have died and I would have thought, for the rest of my life, that you... you... h-hated me.

Mark can’t fight the tears any more.

BENJAMIN
I don’t hate you. I don’t. I was angry, yes, and I was hurt. But I never hated you. Not ever. Not once.

MARK
Oh god, oh fuck, what do I do? What do I do?

BENJAMIN
Mark?

MARK
Are you back?

BENJAMIN
In Canada? Yes.

MARK
For good? Forever?

BENJAMIN
Yes. I’ve agreed to take on an outreach role. I can’t practice here, but I can... do good by bringing in others. And that way I can be... be in Toronto and with...
MARK
Me.

BENJAMIN
Yes.

MARK
Oh, fuck.

They stare at each other, hungry. Helpless.

MARK (CON’T)
I can’t. Roland.

BENJAMIN
Is that his name?

MARK
I can’t do that to him.

BENJAMIN
Do you... love him?

Mark is silent, but it is a confessional silence. A telling silence. Benjamin’s expression shuts, the hope flickering out in his eyes.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
Do you love me?


In this slow, stalking way, Benjamin backs Mark up against the wall.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
Mark. Do you love me?

Mark closes his eyes, shaking. Unable to lie. Equally unable to confess.

Benjamin dips his head low, brushes his lips ever so gently against Mark’s.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
Do you still love me?

Mark can’t take it any more. He shoves his face forward, captures Benjamin’s lips, and devours him. He grabs Benjamin’s face, digs his fingers into his hair, turns him around, slams him back against the wall, desperate and joyful.
MARK
(panting)
I never stopped. I never stopped.

Benjamin melts.

Hands move swiftly. Buttons come undone, hands shove their way past belts and into pants. It is frantic, wild, and suddenly they are laughing, joyous, light, celebratory. Mark gets his hand around behind Benjamin and Benjamin presses his arse back into Mark’s questing touch. His own hand wraps around Mark’s cock and Mark jerks and arches.

MARK (CON’T)
Oh, yes. Right there, right there, Ben...

Between them, the rose that Roland had put in his buttonhole crushes and tumbles. It drops onto Benjamin’s wrist, nearly falling down into Mark’s pants. Mark jerks, startled by the sudden brush of petals against his stomach.

Mark suddenly realizes what he’s doing. His eyes snap open and he jerks back so quickly that Benjamin’s wrist nearly wrenches. The rose tumbles to the floor.

BENJAMIN
Ow!

MARK
Oh my god, your hand!

BENJAMIN
Relax. It’s okay. Much less protective now. See.

He spreads his palms. They both ignore the precome on one of them. Mark studies his scars.

BENJAMIN (CON’T)
Boiling water and scalpels mostly, but some of it was butchering the goats.

MARK
Butchering goats?

BENJAMIN
You’d be surprised how little the art of butchery has to do with the art of surgery.

Mark laughs, and then steps back, all the way back into the kitchen. He studies Benjamin.
MARK
You look happy.

BENJAMIN
So do you.

MARK
I think of James a lot, still.

BENJAMIN
Me too.

There is a long pause as their breathing returns to normal.

MARK
(sadly; quietly)
Why are you here?

BENJAMIN
Don’t the heroes get a second chance in fairy-tales?

MARK
Sometimes.

Another long pause.

BENJAMIN
But not this time.

Another long pause.

MARK
No.

BENJAMIN
I see.

Benjamin turns away, slowly, righting his clothing. He walks to the door like a man to the gallows.

MARK
Not yet, at least.

BENJAMIN
Not yet?

Mark takes a step toward him, hesitant, and then another, decided on his course of action.

MARK
Not yet. Roland is a good man.
Kind. Considerate.
BENJAMIN
Everything I am not.

MARK
But he’s not you.

BENJAMIN
You are a kind man, Mark.

MARK
What I have with him is good.

BENJAMIN
We could be good.

MARK
We can. But not now.

BENJAMIN
When?

MARK
Someday.

Mark and Benjamin linger by the door. Mark tilts his head up. Benjamin kisses him slow, and soft, and sad. They part like molasses, like sticky toffee, like a receding tide: slow, and careful, stuck together, and then all at once.

BENJAMIN
(whispering into Mark’s mouth)
I am not to speak to you—I am to think of you when I sit alone, or wake at night alone, I am to wait—I do not doubt I am to meet you again.

Mark curls his hands into Benjamin’s hair, face screwed up with the multitudes of emotions that are coursing through him. Mark whispers back:

MARK
(tearfully)
I am to see to it that I do not lose you.

They part. Benjamin goes to the door. He opens it, and turns back to Mark, with tears in his eyes.

BENJAMIN
Someday.

Mark nods, fists clenched.
MARK
Someday.

Benjamin steps through the door. And then he is gone.

Mark picks up the rose, straightens a few of the crushed petals, and sets it down carefully on the kitchen counter.

Then Mark reaches behind him and finds a chair, folding into it as the breath leaves his body. He lets his head drop into his hands and takes a deep, shuddery breath, then tips his head back into the light streaming in from the skylight, glinting off the wet streaks on his face. He smiles, then laughs.

Then he picks up Benjamin’s notebook from the side table, and begins to read.

Hightower jumps into his lap. Mark gives the cat a scratch.